

DIAMOND~DICK

BOYS BEST

JR WEEKLY JR.

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 302.

Price, Five Cents.



BERTIE, SUPPORTING THE UNCONSCIOUS GIRL, TURNED IN HIS SADDLE AND SENT A DEFIANT SHOT UPWARD.

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Price Five Cents.

DIAMOND DICK, JR.'S, RIDE FOR LIFE;

OR,

The Hoboes of Hunnewell.

By the author of "DIAMOND DICK."

CHAPTER I.

A NEWSPAPER MAN IN PERIL—DIAMOND DICK, JR.'S RISK.

"Fire! Fire! Fire!"

Out upon the night, with startling distinctness, that terrible cry.

All Reno was wrapped in slumber; it was in the small hours of the morning; the flames had gotten under headway before the discovery was made.

It was the leading hotel of the city, and the watchman, as soon as he discovered the fire, rushed to the street shouting the alarm, and then back again into the building with the same cry.

Windows began to go up here and there, doors were heard to open and shut, half-clad forms began to appear, and as the awful truth burst upon each new discoverer his or her voice was added to the cry, until there was a shout going up that was arousing the city.

In a brief while people were running from every

direction, but it was only too plain to all that the splendid structure was doomed.

Entirely of wood and lightly furnished, it had only been awaiting a stray spark of the incendiary's match to go up like a box of tinder. By the time the inmates were fully aroused it was a roaring furnace.

Great, lurid, liquid tongues of flame shot upward from all the windows of the northern end, and were bursting from window after window all along the front toward the southern extremity. At that end, already the windows of the middle floors were glowing with the white heat that was swelling within.

Men, women, children—all were crowding out through the main entrance of the hotel, in almost every stage of dress and undress.

Cries of alarm and shrieks of despair filled the air.

At some of the windows frightened faces appeared, all reason gone, and their possessors doomed unless cooler heads saved them.

Ladders were being brought, and these were being rescued as speedily as possible, where they could be reached. Where they could not be reached they were directed to jump—jump!

It was their only salvation.

Presently a new cry of horror went up from the great throng that filled the street.

At one of the extreme top windows of the southern end, where the fire had not yet found its way, but beneath where every window was like a blast from Vesuvius, appeared a man.

A frowzy, wild-eyed individual he looked from that distance in the glare of the conflagration; he was set down at once for a tramp, yet how came a tramp to be an inmate of that hotel? But there was the evidence; no doubting what they saw.

He seemed to be the only one left.

No face was at any of the other windows, and all attention was centered upon him.

Leaning far out, the man appeared to be taking a quick, quiet survey of the terrible situation in which he found himself.

Then his voice was heard:

"Hello! there, below!"

"Hello! to you!" went up the answer.

"I see no show for my escape; do you see any hope for me?"

A hundred voices answered a hundred different things, all at once, and it was all unintelligible.

"Let only one man speak," called the doomed man. "If there is a chance that you can see from there which I cannot see from here, let me know it, and be quick."

"Jump!"

"No; I prefer an easier death with a bullet, to that."

"Let him die, then; he is only a tramp anyhow," muttered one heartless man in the throng.

At that moment another great shout went up.

Out from the main entrance, where now the flames were beginning to eat their way through, came a handsome youth with a young woman in his arms.

She was in night dress only, and her superb form lay insensible in his arms. He was fully dressed, even to boots and hat, as if he had taken his time in spite of alarms.

And that face, we have seen it before—it is Diamond Dick, Jr., hero of a hundred adventures!

Though unknown by the people around him, the shout that proclaimed his bravery was deafening.

Cheer broke upon cheer, like waves upon the sand. For the moment the tramp at the upper window was forgotten, under the newer excitement.

Bertie was as cool as if it had been a pleasure picnic, apparently, and bore his lovely burden to a place of safety.

A man and woman, who had been making frantic appeals to everybody, and who had been offering all they possessed in the world if some one would only save somebody dear to them, ran forward to meet Bertie.

Their case had been only one of many, and with everybody shouting, had claimed no more than passing notice. And now, while the woman received the fair girl out of Bertie's arms, the man seized him and embraced him, eagerly demanding his name.

"Don't mention it, sir," said Bertie, tearing himself away; "she was there to be saved, and I saved her, that's all."

"But your name? I must reward——"

A shout at that moment from the man at the upper window drew Bertie's attention, and he ran out from the crowd and looked up at him.

Every moment the flames were crowding nearer and nearer him, and it looked as if no power on earth could save him now. Yet he was holding onto his last thread of hope—that the crowd would do something.

Bertie put his hands to his mouth, and shouted:

"Are you cut entirely off, you up there?"

"Yes, in every direction. I guess it is all up with me. Will you take my name and address and let my folks know?"

"I'll do more than that; I'll have you down from there or die with you, if there is a ghost of a chance for you. But you are in a desperate fix, so give the crowd your name."

"My name is Hobart Esterly. Telegraph the simple fact to the — newspaper, New York City."

"You heard?" asked Bertie of the crowd.

"Yes, yes; but your own name? What is it? Let us know who you are."

"Never mind that now; if I get in a tight place I will reveal it so that my fate will be known."

With that he motioned the crowd to silence, and in that awful moment the multitude was swayed by

his will force and obeyed him as one person, and that one a child.

Again he shouted to the man at the window:

"Keep your grit to the last moment, friend; I will reach you somehow, if it be within human power!"

"All right, I'll hold fast till the flames actually envelope me; then the crack of my pistol will be heard, and you will know what has happened. Don't run the risk of your own life for me."

Bertie was already running toward the end of the building.

He had been in town some days, and he thought he remembered something he had seen there that would be of service now.

Yes, he was not mistaken; there it was—a lightning-rod, running from the ground to the roof, at the southwest corner. He had already caught up a rope as he ran.

He had coiled the rope while running, and now, flinging it over his shoulder, he sprang forward and seized the lightning-rod and began to climb as fast as possible, sparing neither hands nor strength in the desperate undertaking he was attempting.

A cheer broke from the throng.

The man at the window heard it, but could not see what was the cause.

"Keep up courage!" was shouted to him from the street. "That fellow will save you, or he will keep his word!"

"God bless his brave effort!"

"Amen!"

Up and up, and still up; no pause, no wasteful haste; a steady, determined climb.

The roof at last!

There a pause, just a momentary relaxing of the muscles, to gather strength for further effort.

On again, up and over the edge of the roof with the steadiness of the trained athlete, the surety of a panther, the courage and liveness of a tiger.

Up the slope toward the chimney at the end of the peak, presently reaching it, and there another pause, while cheer after cheer resounded below in appreciation of his bravery.

There Bertie rested, on the extreme top, while he unwound the rope and made it secure to the chimney.

He wondered if the flames had yet reached the man?

Would they reach him?

The rope secured, he grasped it with his already torn and bleeding hands, and lowered himself toward the other edge of the roof.

Several minutes had now elapsed, and hot smoke was beginning to envelope the whole structure. Already the other end was ablaze and beginning to sink in at the top.

He reached the edge.

Another cheer that sounded like a roar of ocean in a hurricane.

Every eye was upon him, and as he turned, twisting one foot in the rope and peered over the edge of the roof, his eyes met those of the doomed man in the room just below.

"God bless you!" the man cried. "Leave me; go back if there is yet time. Needless for both to per—"

"Shut up and listen to me," Bertie ordered, peremptorily. "I will give you the end of this rope. Make it fast to your waist, swing out, climb up—climb for your life!"

Bertie was swinging the rope even as he spoke, and Hobart Esterly was not slow to catch it.

Seeing it in his hand, Bertie turned and waited.

The thunder of applause that came up from below was almost deafening in its volume.

Diamond Dick, Jr., was not unmindful of his peril; if the rope should break, if the heat and smoke overcame him, if he found the rod heated by the flames so that it would be impossible to return—

He broke off suddenly; he would not entertain the possibilities.

The man in the room below had lost no time, as extra strain upon the rope attested.

Bertie could not see him, but he could feel the rope pulsate under his exertions, and knew that he was coming.

His head appeared, his shoulders; Bertie lent a hand and he gained the roof, and then Bertie led the way to the chimney and to the avenue of escape—if it remained open to them.

The roof was so hot they could hardly touch it; the smoke was parching their throats and blinding them; but they held bravely on, well knowing that it was a matter of life or death, and that one minute, or two at most, must decide their fate.

The chimney reached, the rod grasped, the descent to the roof at the rear; over, down, and down; a breath of cooler air; hope, courage; wild and deaf-

ening cheering; then a reeling brain, and darkness—this was the experience of bold, brave, and dashing Diamond Dick, Jr.

CHAPTER II.

ACQUAINTANCES FORMED—CONFIDENCES EXCHANGED.

When Bertie opened his eyes he found himself lying on the sidewalk, his head resting on somebody's knee.

It took him but a moment to recollect what had happened. Before him was the great, blazing building, the roof of which was now gone and the walls ready to fall in.

All around was the great crowd.

"Are you all right?" a voice asked.

Bertie looked at the questioner.

It was a seeming tramp, ragged, dirty, and be-whiskered.

"Yes, I am getting my grip again," answered Bertie. "But who the mischief are you?"

"I am the man you risked your life to save."

"And a pesky worthless thing to risk so much fer, I opine," cried a man in the crowd.

"I don't know but what you are right, pardner," said the tramp, in a different style of speech from that he had used in speaking to Bertie. "I reckon I wasn't worth et."

Bertie, however, had not forgotten the name and instructions the man had shouted to the crowd at the time when he thought his fate certain.

This man was something more than a tramp.

"Give me your hand and help me up," said Bertie.

It was done.

Bertie staggered for a moment, but he speedily got his legs under control.

His hands pained and burned, and he looked at them to find them cut, bleeding, and swollen, and he knew they must have attention at once.

"Let's go hunt up a drug store," he said to the seeming tramp. "If your hands are like mine, they will need a little dressing up, after that rough experience."

"Wull, I guess you are right," drawled the tramp. "They feel pooty bad, but I didn't do half the climb-in' you did."

"How did you come in that room, anyhow?" somebody demanded. "What were you doing in that house, such a looking chap as you are?"

"That's the question," some one else supported.

"Mebbe he wasn't there for no honest purpose."

"Better let a constable see to him, I reckon."

"What was I doin' there?" said the tramp. "Why, I went up fer a big snooze, that was all. And I like ter got more'n I bargained for."

"Never mind what he was there for," said Bertie; "I saved his life and I am answerable for him. Have you got a constable here who would have gone up there after him?"

He looked around, his eyes flashing.

No one responded.

"No, I guess not," said Bertie. "Come along, friend, and we'll get our hurts doctored up a little."

Together they pressed their way out of the crowd.

"Now," said the pretending tramp, "I want to thank you heartily for my life. It is a poor return for so great a risk, but it is the best I have to offer. How can I ever repay the debt?"

"Don't mention it," said Bertie. "I would like to know what your game was, though. You are no tramp."

"Right you are. I am a newspaper correspondent. My name is Hobart Esterly, and I am on the staff of the — of New York City. I came out here to get inside information respecting some mining property, and to do it without creating suspicion I decided to disguise myself as a tramp and deadbeat, and beat my way around through the country for a while. Nobody gives much attention to a tramp, you know."

"Not attention enough, of the right kind," said Bertie.

"I guess you are right. Well, I got here at a late hour and took a room, and then got out this fine attire and disguise. Don't you admire it? I put it on before going to sleep, and intended to wake up before daylight and sneak out of the house and begin my work. I wrote a note and left it in the room, asking the proprietor to take care of my effects till called for. He won't be bothered about it now, however."

"No, I guess not. Are you out much?"

"Well, a good suit of clothes and a valise—not a big loss."

"And now you will have to play the tramp whether you would or not, by the way it looks."

"That's right."

"And here is our drug store, I guess."

It was open. Every man, woman and child in the city was up, owing to the big excitement, and Bertie and his friend entered.

"Here, now, you get right out of here," shouted the proprietor, making a charge at Esterly. "Don't want any of your kind around here at a time like this——"

"Hold on!" cried Bertie. "He is all right. We have got our hands hurt, and we want you to lather some arnica on them, or some other stuff that will do them good and take out some of the pain. Here's your chink before you begin."

He tossed an eagle down on the counter with a careless air.

This had the right effect.

The druggist set to work, and in a little while Bertie's hands and those of his friend began to feel better.

When they left the shop daylight was just beginning to break.

"Well, it is time for me to mope out of town, I guess," said Esterly. "I want to thank you again for my life, and there is a favor I would ask of you before we part."

"What is that?" Bertie asked.

"You have not told me what your name is, and I would like to know it, owing you so much."

"My name is Bertie Wade, though I am much better known throughout this region as Diamond Dick, Jr."

"So you are Diamond Dick, Jr., the young dare-devil wizard of the West, of whom I have often heard!"

"But don't make any mention in your paper——"

"I reserve the right to do as I please about that. Give me your hand again!"

"Handle it tenderly," said Bertie.

"You are here on business, then; I venture to guess you are on business wherever you happen to be, if all I have heard about you is true."

"Yes, I am here on business, and perhaps you can give me a helping hand in the very matter I am at work on, seeing that you are a tramp. What do you say to it?"

"What do I say to it? If there is anything on earth I can do for you, after all you have risked for me, you have only to tell me what it is."

"I will tell you. I am looking for a fellow known as Big Ike, commonly called the 'King of Hoboes.'"

He is wanted for a murder at Santa Fé, and I have undertaken to run him in. I had reason to believe that he was in the vicinity of Reno. If you should run across such a character will you telegraph to me here, in care of the sheriff?"

"Will I? Well, you can bet your life I will! Ha! there is a freight train; just my chance."

"Yes, if you want to go by freight," laughed Bertie.

"And I do. Good-by till we meet again."

"Good-by, and good luck to you."

They shook hands, and Esterly hastened off in the direction of the railroad station near by, where a train of freight was pulling slowly out.

Bertie, looking after him, saw him climb into an open freight car, and exchanged a wave of the hand with him as the train rolled away. He then sought another hotel, to finish out his sleep.

CHAPTER III.

THE CAPTURED TRAIN—ESTERLY IN LUCK.

Hobart Esterly, as soon as he had waved the parting salute to his rescuer, looked around the car in which he found himself. It was empty, save that at one end was a lot of old bags or sacking, and kicking these into shape for a bunk, the newspaper man threw himself down upon it.

The rocking motion of the car soon lulled him to sleep.

When he awoke it was with a start. The train was standing still, and loud voices were heard outside.

By the number of voices and the noise they were making, Esterly imagined that there must be a small army around the train, and he got up and looked out the door.

A more heterogeneous congregation of humanity Esterly had never looked upon than he saw there.

And yet there was a similarity withal.

They were tramps, and at first glance there seemed to be a thousand of them. They were swarming over the cars like ants, and it was plain at the first blush that they had captured the train and were looting it.

This was the fact.

The engineer had been signaled to stop at a point where the train was approaching a curve in a piece of woods, and, unable to see what the danger was, he had made every effort to stop as speedily as possible.

The result was that the train had come to a standstill on the curve—enough in itself to make an engineer swear the air blue around him; but, what was worse, was to find that he had been stopped by tramps, as they came out of the woods in a body.

They came with a yell, and that was what had wakened Esterly.

Just as the newspaper man looked out he was seen, and several of the hoboes made a dash for him.

"Glee-ory to snakes!" cried the foremost of these, a great, massive fellow with a shock of red hair, and a tangle of frowzy beard of the same hue. "Ef hyer ain't one of us, takin' a ride in this hyer poor man's parlor kyar!"

He rushed up to Esterly and offered his hand, a member that was half the size of a ham.

He looked a genuine specimen of the genus tramp, clad in a faded and frayed blue shirt, a pair of tattered rough trousers, and big, coarse boots, with a much battered old "plug" hat topping all.

"Put et thar, pardner!" he cried. "Give us ther grip, and come with us to our feast. Glee-ory to snakes! we aire goin' to have ther greatest spread-out ye ever hear'n tell of in yer born days; we aire so. What! yer don't know ther grip?"

Esterly had given his hand, to have it almost crushed in the ponderous paw of the giant.

"Who don't know the grip?"

So demanded another great giant of a fellow, taller than the first, and, if possible, worse looking.

"This hyer feller don't know et," said the first, turning his head, but still holding fast to Esterly's hand. "But he is all right, Ike, or he wouldn't be hyer, you kin bet yer life!"

"I guess you are right, Rattlesnake," agreed the other giant. "Come and jine us, ef ye want to belong to ther great fraternity, and we'll initiate ye into ther mysteries of the inner circle and make ye a full-fledged hobo. Come, what d'ye say?"

"Bless yer hearts, I'm with ye," declared Esterly, leaping out of the car and becoming one of the tattered brigade at once. "I am lookin' my eyes sore for no work and dead loads to gorge, and by the looks of things hyer you mean to eat till the last trump blows."

"You'll do," decided the King of the Hoboes, promptly. "Lend a hand, and we'll see that you don't go empty."

"That's ther talk!" cried the first giant. "What's yer handle, pard?"

"Call me Industrious Bill," said Esterly.

"Industrious?"

"You bet! No feller you ever seen works harder'n I do tryin' to live without work."

"Haw! haw! You aire a genuine specimen, hang me ef you ain't! Wake up snakes, and whistle! Put et thar again, pard! You kin call me Rattlesnake, fer that's jist what I am. Hiss-ss-sss! I'm a tarnel ole crawler, with seventeen rattles and a but-ton!"

While saying this the big fellow imitated the hissing of a serpent, and made motions with body and arms as if crawling and rising to strike.

Esterly had to laugh, in spite of himself.

Meantime the looting of the train was going steadily forward.

One car after another was forced open, and provisions of every kind were thrown out in profusion.

It was all done under the direction of the King of the Hoboes, who at length decided that they had gotten about enough of all the goods they desired.

He sounded a whistle signal that called his men off.

"Now, then, yer kin go ahead with yer darn old bullgine," he called out to the engineer. "We have got all we want. And mind that ye don't tell on us, or we'll run ye into ther ditch some day!"

The engineer gave a savage shriek of the whistle, jerked open the throttle, and, after a good deal of hard work, managed to start his train and get under way, and the tramps were left to enjoy their plunder.

There were about a hundred of them, as Esterly had by this time ascertained.

After the train had gone they gathered up their spoils and took to the woods, the King of the Hoboes leading the way.

Esterly shouldered a box of something and fell in behind the giant of the peculiar appellation, and as they trudged along that worthy presently turned to him and inquired:

"Your front name don't happen ter begin with a B, does et?"

"No," answered Esterly.

He spoke in a low tone.

"I thort not," declared the giant. "At first sight I thort et might, but I soon made up my mind et didn't."

All of which was rather puzzling to Esterly, though perhaps not so to the reader, for if he has been following the adventures of Diamond Dick, Jr., for any length of time, he will remember a certain individual who answered to the name of Handsome Harry. Handsome Harry was on a vacation at present, and was spending it in this peculiar fashion.

In due time they arrived at the tramps' rendezvous.

This was a glade in the heart of the woods, in a natural depression that was well protected on all sides.

Esterly was not long in learning, however, that they had yet another rendezvous, which they considered impregnable, and to which they retired in time of trouble.

The first thing in order, as the King of Hoboes announced, was the initiating of their honored guest into the secrets and mysteries of the "inner circle," as he termed it; and this they proceeded to do forthwith, a process unnecessary to describe at length.

Esterly passed the ordeal with flying colors, and came out with a full knowledge of all the grips, signs, tokens, etc., of the order.

Then came the repast.

Numerous of the boxes were opened, and there was a feast worthy a king.

There were canned meats, pickled, fruits, canned milk—in short, everything that an up-to-date store in any city carries in stock; and these unwashed shirkers of toil went into it to their heart's delight.

"Glee-ory to snakes!" cried Handsome Harry, or Rattlesnake—as he was known to his comrades. "Who says man has got ter earn his sweat by ther bread of his brow? Jist look at me, wull yer? Hyer I be, a-feastin' on ther lavish of ther land, and haven't laid a hair to git et!"

"A feller 'ud be a fool ter work when he kin live like this," put in Esterly—"Industrious Bill."

"That's where you aire right," agreed the King of the Hoboes. "And by ther way, Industrious Bill, I have got a job laid out fer you——"

"Now look here," interposed Esterly, looking around with an air of alarm, "don't think ye kin come no sawbuck racket on me, fer ye can't. I would walk twenty miles out of my way to avoid seein' a sawbuck."

They all laughed heartily.

"Don't be alarmed," said Big Ike. "Et ain't nothin' in ther way of work that I want ye to do."

"What then?"

"I want a man to go into the town of Hunnewell on an errand."

"Oh! I see. And ye think I'm ther chap ye want, eh?"

Esterly was "catching on" to their manner of speech, and was adapting it to his needs.

"Yes. Ye see it is like this: About every man of us has been seen, more or less, and some of us is wanted fer reasons more or less—no need ter specify 'em, while you are a stranger."

"I see."

"And, then, you look jist a little decenter 'a most of us."

"All right, I'm your gander," said Esterly. "All ye have got ter do is tell me what ther mission is."

"You know that you are now one of us," the King of the Hoboes reminded.

"It would be queer if I didn't know it," was the response.

"And for one of the inner circle to peach on his pals means—what?"

"Death!" cried they all, loudly.

"Yes, death. So, you see, we are safe in trusting you, Industrious Bill. If you play us false, or try to play us false, you sign your own death warrant!"

"Oh! you kin trust me," cried Esterly. And to himself he added—"If you want to."

"Well, after this spread is eat we're goin' to our stronghold, takin' with us all our stuff, and then I'll see about your settin' out. We'll scrape together the best clothes that kin be found in ther gang, and mebby you will look half-way respectable."

Just at that moment a horseman rode into the glade.

At sight of him every tramp was on his feet instantly, and those who were armed produced their guns.

"Aw," said the stranger, adjusting a single glass to one of his eyes, "could you tell me the way to a town called Wadsworth? You see, I have become separated from my party——"

"Glee-ory to snakes!" suddenly cried out Rattlesnake. "Ain't this hyer a streak of luck? Come and kiss me, or come and cuss me, or do somethin' that will do justice to me feelins! King of ther

Hoboes, what do yer think of et? Wake up, snakes, and play yer rattles!"

"What is the matter with you?" demanded Big Ike.

"Don't ye see?"

"No."

"Give a guess, then."

"I've got no time to bother about guessing riddles."

"Wull, you wanted to send a well-dressed feller into Hunnewell, didn't ye?"

"Whew!" whistled the King of the Hoboes.

"That is jist the idee. Yes, we kin show ye the way to Wadsworth, stranger; but hadn't ye better dismount and take a snack to eat first?"

"Well—aw—I don't mind if I do, for I am devilish hungry, don't ye know."

With that the stranger slipped out of the saddle, but his feet had no more than touched the ground when a dozen hands seized him and he was held securely, in spite of his struggles and protests.

"Yes, we kin show ye ther way to Wadsworth, of course we kin," said the King of the Hoboes; "but before we do et we will have to borry them 'ar duds you have got on yer back. Don't make a kick, now, fer that won't help yer case a bit, and will only make it unpleasant for us."

CHAPTER IV.

A DISPATCH TO DIAMOND DICK, JR.

A more surprised man than this tourist was perhaps never seen.

And he was not more surprised than he was enraged and indignant at what had taken place.

"This is a houtrage!" he cried, his anger bringing his "aitch" into prominence. "Hi will 'ave the whole lot of you harrested! Hi demand my release hinstantly!"

"Ye jist keep cool and no harm will come to ye," said the King of the Hoboes. "If ye go to cuttin' up any shines, ye are likely to git hurt, and nobody to blame but yerself. I told ye that all we want is to borry yer duds fer a spell."

"Hand would you send me hon my way naked!"

"Oh, no; we'll give you enough of our clothes to cover your skin. Come, now, will ye shed, or must we strip ye?"

"Hi never hin hall my life——"

"That's all right, don't mention et. Boys, jist take off his duds fer him."

This they proceeded to do, despite his struggles, and in a few minutes he had been relieved of his hat, coat, vest, trousers and shoes, and stood before them in his underwear.

He was puffing with indignation to a point almost upon the danger line of explosion.

Esterly did not approve of such proceedings as this, but what was he to do?

If he let out that he was other than what he appeared to be, his life might pay the forfeit.

"And now, Industrious Bill, your turn," said the King of the Hoboes, turning to him.

Without a moment's hesitation, Esterly began to divest himself.

In a few seconds it was done, and he donned the apparel of the English tourist.

It made such a striking change in his appearance that the hoboes had to laugh at the sight, but it was no laughing matter for the Englishman.

"What ham Hi to do?" he kept asking.

"Glee-ory to snakes!" cried Rattlesnake. "I'll tell ye what he kin do, Big Ike."

"What is that?" the King of the Hoboes asked.

"Let him do as he pleases. Let him go as he is, or git into ther duds jist shed by Industrious Bill. What does et matter to us?"

"Et don't matter at all," laughed the King of the Hoboes. "Do you hear, stranger? You kin suit yerself, but make a little haste about et, fer we have got ter be moseyin' out of hyer."

The tourist was now free, and he was left to do as he liked, while the hoboes, their repast at an end, began packing up, preparatory to removal to their other rendezvous.

Esterly felt sorry for the fellow, but for his life he did not dare give him a hint that the clothes were clean and "all right."

It was a ludicrous sight, to see the dainty Englishman pick up first one garment and then another, at arm's length, and not only look at it, but smell of it as well.

It was Hobson's choice, that or nothing.

He screwed his eyeglass into his eye and made a close inspection, and at last, admonished by the King of the Hoboes that there was no more time for him to waste, he put on the clothes in a gingerly fashion.

He was then allowed to mount his horse, and, some

of the hoboes fetching horses from somewhere in the woods, they loaded up their goods and were soon on their way.

The King of the Hoboes had no intention of taking the tourist to his secret rendezvous.

In due time they came to a crossroads.

One of these roads led away to Wadsworth and another to Hunnewell, and here a halt was called.

"Now," said the King of the Hoboes to the tourist, "you kin git down off'n that 'ar hoss and leave him in our keepin', and if you foller that road you will come to Wadsworth in due course."

"But my horse?"

"That is all right; we have got use for him. Now, then, you git; and don't ye dare to look behind, either!"

With that the King of the Hoboes drew a formidable-looking gun from his belt and aimed it at the timid young man, who set out as fast as he could go in the direction indicated.

Big Ike then turned to Industrious Bill.

"Now, then," he said, "you mount this hyer critter and set out for Hunnewell in this hyer other direction. I'll ride jist a little ways with ye, and so tell ye what's required."

"All right," said Esterly, and he was soon in the saddle.

They started.

"Is yer memory good?" asked the King of the Hoboes the first thing.

"Yes, I reckon it is, tol'able," answered Industrious Bill.

"Then pay attention to what I have to tell ye, and don't ye miss a single item of et. I have had my eye on ye sharp, and I believe ye are all right, but if ye try any dodge with us—— Well, ye know what."

"If ye can't trust me, don't send me," said Esterly.

"But I do trust ye. I am only warnin' ye, that's all. And now here is ther bill of p'tic'lars."

Thereupon he told all that was needful, and, that done, took leave of his new ally and returned to his band, while Industrious Bill continued on in the direction of Hunnewell.

In due time he rode into that town.

He rode leisurely along the street until a saloon bearing a certain sign drew his attention.

There he turned in and stopped, throwing his rein over a post, and sauntered in and looked well around before he spoke to anybody.

He picked out his man.

A description the King of the Hoboes had given him enabled him to do that.

"Wall, who'r' you an' what d'ye want?" the proprietor of the place demanded, seeing that the stranger had picked him out.

Esterly did not reply till he came up close.

Then he whispered one word.

The man gave a start.

"See hyer," he said, "you have got to prove up 'fore I kin put much faith in ye. Who sent ye hyer?"

"The King of the Hoboes."

"What is his name?"

"Big Ike Bolson."

"Wull, that is straight, sure enough. Give us yer hand."

They clasped hands, and Esterly gave the grip he had been instructed to use.

"It is all right," said the proprietor, whose name, by the way, was Sid Flanders. "Come with me into the back room here."

Esterly followed him, and the door was closed.

"Now, then, what?" Flanders asked.

"Well, Big Ike wants to know the lay of the land respectin' that 'ar bank business."

"How much did he tell you about et?"

"All he knowed, I reckon, seein' I'm one that's goin' to have a hand in crackin' ther crib."

"Oh-ho! Well, if that is the case, of course I can speak out to you the same as to Big Ike himself. But why didn't he come?"

"He has got news that a chap called Diamond Dick, Jr., is lookin' for him, and he didn't want to be seen."

"That is sensible, anyhow. And you want the points fer him, hey?"

"Yes."

"Well, I have got it about down fine: The cashier, whose name is Joe Gregory, has been away two weeks on a visit to his folks up at Reno, and he is expected home to-night by train. That train gits in about midnight, and Big Ike kin have some of his men on hand at the depot to nab him and carry him off to his hidin'-place, where he kin force out of him ther combination."

"And this is what I am ter carry back to Big Ike?"

"Yes."

"And that is all?"

"That is ther sum and substance of ther hull business. That is what Big Ike wants ter know about."

"All right; then I will be goin'. I have got some more lookin' around to do fer him, and then I'll slink out of town as quiet as I kem in and be off to report."

"By ther way, tell Big Ike that he must send me word, so I will know when ter be on hand."

"All right, I'll bear that in mind."

There was further talk, but of no interest to the reader, and Industrious Bill went out.

He had given Sid Flanders to infer that he was going to nose around a little to see if he could pick up anything concerning Diamond Dick, Jr.

Esterly was delighted to think that he would be able so soon to do a good turn for Bertie, who had risked his life so nobly in his behalf at Reno, and meant to see the thing to the end if he could.

He went first to the post office, not that he expected to learn anything there, but he wanted to fool Flanders if he happened to be watching his movements.

From there to the hotel, from there to various stores and shops, and other saloons, one of the latter being near the railroad depot.

After entering that particular saloon he slipped out the back way and went to the railroad station, where he seized a telegraph blank and wrote the following:

BERTIE WADE, JR., Reno, Nevada:

Come to Hunnewell at once, but come incog. Will meet you in town if possible. Big Ike with a gang of toughs is in hiding near this place, and I am inside.

ESTERLY.

The message written, the newspaper man paid for it and urged the operator to get it off as quickly as possible, and keep it entirely shady.

"I'll do that, you bet," said the operator. "Our company is after that same Big Ike for that freight train hold-up this morning, and you are just the fellow we would like to get hold of."

"What for?" asked Esterly.

"Why, a sheriff's posse is going to scour the country for the hoboos, and you could guide them to the hiding-place."

"Nothing would please me better," said Esterly, "but the fact of the business is I have never been there myself yet, and won't know the way until I have learned it."

"Is that straight?"

"Of course it is."

"Who is this man Wade you are telegraphing to?"

"How do I know that I can trust you?"

"Why, I am in the employ of this company, and I am against Big Ike and all his crew from the word go."

"Well, the fellow I have telegraphed to is Diamond Dick, Jr., and I mean to aid him in making a capture of Big Ike."

"Whew! Then if we can get our force here by midnight, when that little whirlwind arrives, and you are here to meet him, we will be prepared to scoop the whole shooting-match. Excellent!"

"Yes, but you want to observe the strictest silence about it, or all the fat will be in the fire, as the old saying has it."

"I'm mum, you bet."

They parted with that, Esterly going out and the operator sitting down to rattle off the message, and a man in the waiting-room, apparently half asleep on one of the settees, kept his position until the message had been clicked off, when he rose and left the station. Inside of ten minutes a horseman was dashing away in the direction of Big Ike's rendezvous.

CHAPTER V.

THE CASHIER'S STORY—DIAMOND DICK, JR.'S, PLANS.

Diamond Dick, Jr., was seated in the office of the sheriff at Reno, when a messenger entered with a telegram and inquired for him.

Bertie was closeted with the sheriff, trying to learn something of the whereabouts of Big Ike and his band of hoboos, and whether the authorities knew anything of their movements.

"For me?" Bertie asked.

"Yes," said the sheriff.

Bertie took it and opened it immediately.

"Ha! now we are on the right track," he cried. "I lost nothing by the risk I ran for that fellow's life last night, sheriff."

"What is it?"

"I know where Big Ike is now, and I bet I'll have him before he is twenty-four hours older!"

"At the same time look out that he don't get you," the sheriff gave advice. "A murderer is a desperate fellow when you corner him."

"He will think he has caught a hornet if he does, if he gives me half a chance to sting him," said Bertie, grimly.

"I am well aware of that. I am sorry now that my deputy and his posse are not here, that they set out before this word arrived. But I sent them where the train was held up, to take the trail from there, so they will be on the scene of action all in good time, I don't doubt."

"Too bad your wounded leg keeps you from joining me, sheriff."

"Yes, for nothing would please me better."

Bertie had heard, of course, the report of the hold-up through the sheriff, and it was believed that it had been the work of Big Ike and his band.

Now this message Bertie had received made it seem positive that such was the fact.

While they were talking there came a call for the sheriff, and he excused himself and passed out into the other room, leaving Bertie to think upon the situation.

Presently the sheriff opened the door, and said:

"Come in here, Mr. Wade, here is something more that will interest you."

Bertie promptly passed into the other room, where he found a young man of about his own age, certainly no older in looks.

"This is Mr. Joe Gregory, cashier of the bank at Hunnewell," said the sheriff. "Mr. Gregory, allow me to make you acquainted with Diamond Dick, Jr."

"Diamond Dick, Jr.!"

"At your service," said Bertie.

They shook hands.

"And I have a service for you, I guess," said the cashier. "I am a thousand times obliged to you for this introduction, sheriff."

"Don't mention it; I told you I had just the man you wanted right on hand for you."

"What is the racket?" asked Diamond Dick, Jr.

"I have just received a telegram from my father, the president of the bank, summoning me home immediately. I intended going by the late train, anyhow, but if this message had come an hour sooner I could have gone by the day train."

"Just my case," said Bertie.

"Then you were going to Hunnewell?"

"Yes. But what is the trouble; anything I can do for you?"

"Read for yourself."

He handed his telegram to Bertie, who read as follows:

JOE GREGORY, Reno, Nevada:—Come home by very first train. I have just been handed this note from an unknown source: "Look

out! Your bank is going to be robbed." It may be a fake, but you had better come.
J. GREGORY.

"What do you think of it," Gregory asked.

"This message is no fake, anyhow," said Bertie.

"But what about the note he says he has received?"

"I am inclined to think that it is warning of a genuine plot to rob the bank."

"You do?"

"Yes; and I think I can tell you pretty closely how it came to him."

"How?"

"Through the same person who sent me this message only a little while ago. I think I can tell you more—that Big Ike, the King of the Hoboes, and his band are at the bottom of it."

Bertie's guess was right.

Esterly, after leaving the railroad station, had penciled the brief note of warning to the bank president, and had found means of sending it to him.

"And what is going to be done?" asked the cashier.

"I am just evolving a scheme," said Bertie. "But one thing, you had better telegraph to your father to put an extra watchman in the bank to-night."

"Oh, he will not fail to do that."

"It will do no harm to remind him of it. At the same time you can let him know on what train you will be home."

"Well, that is so."

"But here is an idea for you to think about."

"What is that?"

"Let me have your clothes—we look something alike, and I will go in your identity."

"What good will that do?"

"It will be a disguise for me, and some one may be there on watch who will never imagine that the man he sees is not you. By getting on this trail, I may reap a reward in the way of finding Big Ike the sooner."

"But what of your friend, who is going to be there to meet you?" asked the sheriff.

"It is not certain that he will be there."

"But if he is."

"Well, I will know him, and if I see him first I can let him onto the racket. But it hinges right here: Will you, Mr. Gregory, go in my identity?"

"Great Scott! I wouldn't dare take such a risk!"

"Why?"

"Because there are hundreds of scoundrels who

are only waiting for a fine opportunity to cut your throat for you."

"Well, I guess that is right," agreed Bertie.

"And what could I do, if I fell in with any such? They would think they had you, and I would be only a babe as compared with yourself."

"Well, then, we'll have to modify that plan a little. I see you carry an ample duster there on your arm."

"Yes, and you are welcome to that."

"Happen to have a silk cap along with it?"

"In one of the pockets."

"Excellent! I will don the linen duster and button it well up, put on the cap and carry my hat in my pocket, and when I step off the train they will be willing to swear it is you."

"And what about me?"

"You can keep a little in the dark, and get home to your father as quickly as you can, or to the bank, just as you think best."

"That is a fine scheme," approved the sheriff. "It is bound to work, and I believe that it will put Big Ike in your hands."

"That remains to be seen," said Bertie.

They arranged the details there in the sheriff's office, and when they went forth Bertie wore the linen duster and the skull cap.

It would have been hard for a casual acquaintance to recognize in him that young terror to evildoers—"Little Lightning."

They were at the station at train time, and were soon on their way.

At midnight the train drew into Hunnewell.

When Bertie got off the train the night man at the depot spoke to him, calling him Mr. Gregory.

Bertie responded pleasantly, and passed on, having been advised by Joe Gregory which way it would be natural for him to turn on leaving the platform.

There were but few persons around.

Gregory himself had gotten off the train on the side opposite the platform, and so had not been seen.

Bertie had gone but a little way when he suddenly tripped over a rope that had been stretched across the sidewalk about ankle high.

He fell forward heavily, instinctively putting out his hands to save himself, and before he touched the ground four powerful men leaped out of the shadows and threw themselves upon him.

Diamond Dick, Jr., was in a fix.

No time was given him to defend himself; no time even to cry out.

A hand was clapped over his mouth instantly, and he was pulled out of the street into a broad space of vacant lots.

There he was gagged and then securely bound.

He had only one hope, and that was that Gregory had seen the attack and would hasten to his aid with help.

But Gregory had not seen him.

Coming out to the street, as soon as the train had passed, he could not but wonder what had become of his friend.

Bertie's captors made no move further until everything was again quiet and no footsteps could be heard in any direction, and everything at the station was still.

Then horses were quietly led forward, and Bertie was lifted up onto one of these and securely tied there.

The others mounted, and all rode off in the darkness.

They passed out of town at a walk, by the shortest way—and the depot was on the outskirts anyhow.

Everything worked to their advantage; Diamond Dick, Jr., was in their power, without a clue as to his disappearance, and it might have been a mystery forever.

Finally his captors struck into one of the main highways, where they gave rein to their horses, and dashed away at a quick pace. They were heading for the mountains, which they reached after a ride of two hours, and at last, after ascending a sharp incline of considerable extent, paused upon a broad plateau.

CHAPTER VI.

INDUSTRIOUS BILL IN A PREDICAMENT.

Let us return to Esterly.

After he had telegraphed to Bertie, and had managed to get a brief note delivered to the bank president, he sought something to eat.

This was easy to find, in a town like Hunnewell, and, after he had put a square meal under his vest once more, he felt quite equal to the return journey and further adventure with the hoboes.

Meanwhile the fellow who had been shamming sleep in the railroad station was speeding away toward the mountains.

Dropping in at Flanders' place for a farewell word, Esterly was soon on his way.

He followed carefully the directions he had received.

At length he came again to the crossroads where he had parted company with the King of the Hoboes and his band.

Here he turned in the direction they had taken, and eventually he entered the foothills, and proceeded on into a gorge that led westward into the mountains.

Presently he was challenged.

He drew rein.

"Who comes there?" was demanded.

"One of the faithful—a member of the inner circle," he responded.

"Advance and give the password."

Esterly rode forward, and was met by one of the hoboes, armed.

There was an exchange of words and signs, and he was allowed to ride on his way.

He had not gone a great distance further when he came to where a horseman was standing waiting for him, who said:

"This hyer is about as far as you kin go et alone; I have been sent out to guide you in."

"All right," said Esterly, "I'm willin' to be guided; it is too much like work to find my own way. I had ruther be industrious doin' nothin'."

This fellow led the way around through the gorge for a distance, then up and out of it, then up a long, steep incline of solid rock, where scarce a mark of the iron-shod hoofs was left.

At last they came out upon the plateau mentioned at the close of the preceding chapter.

"Glee-ory to snakes!" was the first thing Esterly heard when he drew rein, and he saw Rattlesnake coming forward from an old ruin, flourishing his arms. "Ef et ain't our pard, Industrious Bill, back ergain in full feather, big as life and twice as nat'ral!"

"You shut yer yaup-trap, will ye?" demanded Big Ike, as he followed from another direction. "Don't fergit that I am King of ther Hoboes."

"Wake up, snakes, an' waltz! What's eatin' you, Big Ike?"

So demanded Handsome Harry.

"I want you to leave business matters to me, that's what," was the snarl.

Certainly something was wrong with the King of the Hoboes.

"Glee-ory to snakes! Who's interferin' with yer business? What have I done? Can't a feller yaup a welcome to one of ther band without your gittin' on yer gristle about et? Waugh! I want ter know. I'm ther king rattler of ther lot, whur I come from, an' I've got seventeen rattles an' a button! Hiss-ss-sss! Big Ike, ef you warn't bigger by some inches 'n what I be, I ber durn ef I wouldn't git up an' take a chaw out of your ear; I would so."

But Big Ike went on, paying no heed to the fellow, although the rest of the band laughed at the capers and antics made by the "king rattler of the lot," while he vociferated as quoted.

"So you are back, aire ye?" Big Ike greeted Esterly.

"You bet," was the response.

"And how did ye make out?"

"First-class, A No. 1."

"You seen Flanders?"

"Sure, and got all he had ter tell."

Thereupon Esterly gave a succinct account of what had passed between himself and the Hunnewell saloon-keeper.

The King of the Hoboes listened attentively to the end.

"You have done well," he said. "The fact of ther business is, you have done too well."

"What do ye mean?" asked Esterly.

"Jist what I say. You have done too durn well."

"Glee-ory to snakes——"

"You shut your head, or I'll shut it fer ye!"

Big Ike whipped out a gun as he spoke, and it might have been noticed that some of his men did the same.

These men had pressed close around Esterly while he was telling what he had learned at Hunnewell, and they remained there with revolvers held close by the side of their legs.

"I don't understand what ye mean, King of the Hoboes," said Industrious Bill. "Have I overdone the matter?"

"Yes, ye have, and I am goin' to make et mighty plain to ye what I mean."

"I reckon ye'll have to."

Esterly tried to speak in an easy manner, but he was far from feeling as he spoke.

"I want ter know what ye meant by sendin' a mes-

sage to Diamond Dick, Jr., at Reno, tellin' him to come to Hunnewell at once, and that Big Ike and his gang wur camped near there, and that you wur inside? What did ye mean by that?"

Esterly tried hard to keep his composure, but it was impossible for him to do so.

He had not had the experience necessary to make his nerve invulnerable.

"What did yer mean by et?" Big Ike thundered.

There was another man among them who was almost as much taken aback by this accusation.

That was the Rattlesnake of "seventeen rattles and a button" distinction, who looked and listened with eyes dilated and mouth agape.

"Why don't yer speak?" roared Big Ike.

"Why, because you have surprised it all out of me," answered Esterly, pulling himself together as well as he could. "Have you got proof that I did anything of that kind?"

"Proof! Of course I have got proof."

"Then I demand to know what your proof is."

Esterly was getting his grip again, and was making a show of indignation.

"You shell have et," declared the King of the Hoboes.

He called out for one Juniper Jim to come forward, and the fellow who had been pretending sleep in the depot at the time the message was sent came swaggering forward.

"Hyer is my proof," cried Big Ike.

Esterly could not remember that he had ever seen the man before in his life.

"You can't squirm out of et nohow," said Juniper Jim. "I was thar in the station myself, pickin' up p'int's that would be of use to us, and I heard yer message ticked off."

"You heard my message ticked off?"

"You bet. I used ter be a lightnin'-jerker myself, when I was young and handsome, but I got to hittin' ther bottle and lost my job on that 'count, and now I'm a hobo. But that ain't to ther p'int; you sent jist that message, and I am hyer to swear to et."

"Now, what have you to say?" demanded Big Ike.

"I can't say anything, if you are goin' to take this fellow's word against mine," answered Industrious Bill.

"No, I guess yer can't say nothin', that's ther fact. And you kin bet that I am goin' to take his word in ther matter. I was a fool to trust you, anyhow."

Esterly looked around, as if to see if there was any chance for escape.

He had not a ghost of a chance.

Half a dozen revolvers were aimed straight at his heart.

In spite of his effort to appear calm, his face paled and his hands trembled.

"Come, git down from that there hoss," ordered the King of the Hoboes, "and ef ye lift a finger in resistance et will cost ye dear, I warn ye."

There was nothing for the daring newspaper man to do but obey. He had taken the risks, and now he must pay the price, but he would have done the same thing over again.

He regretted nothing when he thought of what Diamond Dick, Jr., had risked for him.

No sooner had he dismounted than he was seized.

"Glee-ory to snakes!" cried out Rattlesnake, having just found his tongue after his great surprise. "Somebody kick me, ter prove to my befuddled mind thet I am awake and not dreamin'. Is et possible that this hyer is ther dove thet we took to our buzzoms, that has now turned out ter be a viper that has turned and stung ther hand that warmed et to life? Wake up, snakes, and wobble!"

"That is jist the plain fact of et," declared Big Ike. "But he has stung his last sting, you kin bet on thet."

"What aire ye goin' ter do with him?"

"Hang him, by glory!"

"It won't do ter do it to-day, and here," interposed Juniper Jim.

"Ther music et won't!" cried the King of Hoboes. "What is ther reason et won't do?"

"You fergit what I told ye 'bout a deputy and posse settin' out from Reno to round us up. Ef et should be that we git ther wust of et, we don't want no blood ter answer fer."

"You are a calf and a coward!"

"Well, mebbly I am, but I don't run my neck into a noose if I know et. I say no hangin' till this racket is over."

"Glee-ory to snakes, no!" chimed in Handsome Harry. "I ain't 'customed ter wearin' collars myself, and I don't want to begin now with one made of hemp. Some other way, Big Ike."

Handsome Harry had an ax to grind.

He had gotten it through his head that if this man had really sent a message to Diamond Dick, Jr., he must be a friend of Bertie's.

For that reason it was for him to befriend the man and defend his life to the last gasp, if it came to that. Bertie would expect it of him, and he was more than willing to do it for Bertie's sake.

"We can hang him and bury him, and who will be ther wiser?" cried the King of Hoboes. "We have got one prisoner too many on our hands now, in that girl that we expected to git ther ransom fer, which don't seem ter materialize worth a cent."

"I don't vote fer hangin'," cried Rattlesnake. "I am as good a member as thar is in this hyer inner circle, and I think I voice ther sentymint of ther gang when I say no blood on our hands in this hyer case. Glee-ory to snakes, no! What do yer say, boyees? Thar's a deputy and a posse after us, and Diamond Dick, Jr., on our trail, an' we want ter keep our hands clean!"

"That's my stand," agreed Juniper Jim.

These two expressions influenced the large majority of the band, and they spoke up accordingly.

The result was that Industrious Bill was securely bound and put into a part of the old ruins for safe keeping until such time as he could be taken out privately and disposed of.

CHAPTER VII.

DESPERATE WORK—FLIGHT AND PURSUIT.

When the captors of Diamond Dick, Jr., reached the plateau with their prisoner, they flung themselves out of their saddles.

This rendezvous of the hoboes had been, in times past, the location of an old Spanish bocaste, or crushing mill, a primitive machine for the reduction of ore.

Considering the time, this plant had been a pretentious affair. It consisted not only of the ore reducer, but other buildings around it, and a line of stone barracks for the workmen as well as a group of better houses for their overseers.

The plateau was well hidden in the mountains, and a long flight of stone steps, on one side, led up to it, having been chiseled in the solid rock by those early toilers. There was another way of mounting to the plateau, the way we have seen, by which Esterly had been conducted thither, and by which Diamond Dick, Jr., had now been brought a prisoner.

Diamond Dick, Jr., was speedily relieved of his knife and guns, and was placed in a small stone

house, the entrance to which was guarded by two enormous bloodhounds.

These dogs, one on each side of the door, looked at the prisoner in a manner almost human for their intelligence.

They seemed eager for some suspicious move on his part that would be their excuse for leaping upon him and rending him to pieces.

Bertie wisely made no such move.

In fact, he was about as helpless a prisoner as could be imagined.

He was left with the warning that any move on his part would bring the two dogs in upon him, and that would save his captors the trouble of lynching him on the morrow.

Bertie had taken as close a look of his surroundings as possible.

He had noted that most of the buildings were falling into ruins, and while the walls of some were fairly well preserved, nearly all were roofless.

The one he was in was in that condition, and the floor was covered with the debris accumulated during the passing centuries.

He had not been able to see all of it, in the few brief moments given him, but as he looked out through the open door by which the dogs were on guard, he was able to get a fair lay of the land in one direction.

He had not been many minutes alone when Big Ike came in.

There was light enough through the open roof for them to see each other quite distinctly.

At a word from him the two dogs crouched down on the floor.

"So, Diamond Dick, Jr.," Big Ike greeted, "ye thought ye was clever enough to git away with ther King of Hoboes, did ye?"

"I didn't think anything about it," answered Bertie.

"Have you any idea what fate is in store fer you?"

"Not the slightest."

"Mebby ye don't keer."

"I have heard my fate decided so many times that it has come to be an old story."

"Et has, hey? Well, ye won't do any worryin' ef I don't tell ye, but look out fer me, that's all."

"That is what I have been doing."

"Yes, to yer sorrer, as you will soon see. Me and

ther boys has hit et rich, and we mean ter work this thing fer all thar is in et. See?"

"Oh, yes, clearly."

"I know what you are after me fer; it's on 'count of that Santa Fé affair. I could be sent up fer life fer that, I reckon, but you kin bet yer neck that I ain't goin' ter be."

"Sure of it?"

"Be I sure of et? Great cats! ain't I got you dead to rights, and ain't you the only chap that's after me on that? I am posted, you bet, and I know what is goin' on a good deal better'n folks think I do. But thar is somethin' in et that I want to ask ye."

"What is it?"

"Why wur you toggged like that bank cashier when my men nabbed ye at ther station? They thought they had him, but when they kem to open that linen duster to disarm ye they knowed ye by yer own fancy dress instanter, and they kem and told me. You see, ye ain't half as smart as ye lay claim to be, and now ye are about done with earthly things fer good and all."

"You don't say so," drawled Bertie.

"Yes, I do say so!" grated the King of Hoboes. "For just two bits, I would tickle yer liver with my bowie this minute!"

Bound as he was, Bertie wisely saw that it would be better not to enrage the fellow further, so he held his peace, and made no rejoinder to that terrible suggestion.

"Ye see," the King of the Hoboes went on, "we thought we had young Gregory, the cashier of the bank. Et don't matter if I do tell you, seein' that thar ain't no earthly chance fer you to git away from us. We meant to torture him into tellin' us the combination to the safes."

"Then it is lucky for him that he is not here," said Bertie.

"And lucky for me that you are!" grated Big Ike. "We kin see to you, and then make another raid and get hold of him."

"Yes, nothing will be easier than that," Bertie agreed. "But maybe there are some things that you have not taken into account."

"What's them?"

"Well, the deputy sheriff and his posse, for one thing; and then the fact that the bank people have been warned, and will be ready for your reception, if you pay them a visit."

"Curse ye! have you let that out?"

"It is out, though I can't claim the credit of the thing. You had better go slow, I warn you, for your own good."

"And I warn you that you had better make yerself ready ter take the long journey at daylight, fer that is what's goin' to happen to ye. I'm havin' yer grave dug now."

And with that Big Ike left the stone house, with a word of command to the dogs to guard well their prisoner.

The first thing Bertie did was to try the strength of the bonds with which he was confined.

He made the discovery that it would be useless for him to try to get rid of them unaided.

And every move made brought a low warning growl from one or the other of the dogs.

"I guess I will have to give it up," Bertie said to himself, "and trust to luck. Something will happen in my favor before the hour of execution arrives."

So he laid himself on the debris on the floor, and gave himself up to thought, and ere long he was asleep.

How long he slept he did not know.

He was awakened by a strange hissing close to his ears.

With a start he sat up, and both dogs were instantly on their feet bristling and growling.

"Glee-ory to snakes!" whispered a voice. "Don't do nothin' ter git them critters to yelpin', or et is all up. I am hyer to help ye a bit, if possible ter do et."

"Handsome Harry!"

"Ther same, you bet. There same old Sarpint of Siskiyou County, State of Californee, with the same old seventeen rattles and not even ther button mis-sin'. That's me, pard, right up ter date. But they know me hyer as Rattlesnake, and not by my real handle."

"Well, where are you?" asked Bertie.

"Whur be I? Well, I am huggin' ther ground behind this hyer bungalow of your'n, as flat as a pancake without any leven in et. And I have got a hole dug under the wall about as big as my arm."

"Can't you come around in front and kill these dogs, and set me free?"

"Wake up snakes, an' warble! Say, do ye think I am in a hurry to have a coroner set on all that would be left of me ef I done that? Not any."

"I thought maybe they would obey you."

"Nit. They 'pear to know true hobo from false, and I don't stand well on their list. See how et is?"

"Well, if that is the case, don't take the risk. But what are you going to do, now that you have got the hole under the wall?"

"Why, I want to pass a bowie and a couple of guns in to ye."

"Wouldn't it have been easier to throw them in over the top, seeing that there is no roof to the shebang?"

"Never thort of that, on my word. But then that would only set them kussed ki-yis ter yowlin' and fetch somebody prowlin' around ter see what's ther matter."

"But what use can I make of a bowie and guns with my hands tied?" Bertie questioned.

"That's so, by gosh!"

"You see," Bertie whispered, "you will have to come in here somehow and free me."

"And git everylastin'ly chawed up? But I'll do et ef you say so; only the ruction will waken ther hull darn nest and bring 'em buzzin' 'round hyer thicker'n hoss flies."

"Well, can you reach inside with your bowie?"

"I opine ter reckon I kin, boy."

"Try it, and hold the knife still with a tight grip, and if I can get my hands down to it I will manage to cut the thongs on its point."

"Wake up snakes, and double-shuffle! Boy, ef I had your brains you bet I would amount to somethin' in this hyer world. Now, thar is somethin' else that never kem into my noodle at all."

"Well, try it."

"You bet."

Bertie heard a scraping sound, and then the words:

"Thar she is, now, Bertie, and ef you kin find ther p'int of et you will be all hunk."

Berties turned over with his back to the wall, his hand being tied behind him, and felt along carefully with his fingers.

In a few moment he was rewarded. He had found the knife.

There it stuck, almost its full length out of the ground, and Bertie moved so as to bring the cords that held his wrists into contact with its keen edge.

In doing this he had to use great care not to cut himself, and he had to be as quiet as possible, in or-

der not to anger the two bloodhounds that were his keepers.

Having hooked the knife about right, he gave a pull, and to his keen delight his hands came free.

"Keno!" he ejaculated.

"Have ye done ther biz?" asked Handsome Harry.

"You bet. Let me take the knife, now, and hand in the revolvers."

"Hyet they are. I'm 'most tickled to death, I am, ter think that I have been able to help ye. I was worried into a brain fever tryin' to git some way to send word to ye at Reno, as you said——"

"I got the word——"

"Yes, I know, and that is jist what I want to talk about now. That feller is here a prisoner, and not only him, but a blame fine gal that they are keepin' fer ransom. Oh! I tell ye these hyer hoboos are a prime lot of cutthroats, sure as you're born."

They held quite a conversation, in which Bertie learned all that his giant pard could tell him and gave such instructions as were necessary.

He expected Handsome Harry to bring a horse to the door of that old house, or as close as possible, some time between that hour and morning, and give him a chance to escape.

Now armed, he could easily dispose of the dogs, a run and a leap would put him in the saddle, and before pursuit could be gotten under way he would be off and out of reach. Then he would return with help to the rescue of Esterly and the young woman.

Such was his plan, but it didn't work that way.

Handsome Harry did not always do just as directed, or obey instructions to the letter.

Whatever the reason, he failed on this occasion, and daylight began to dawn and nothing had been seen or heard of him. Bertie was on the point of killing the dogs and making a break for liberty anyhow, when he heard a step.

He knew at once that it was not the Serpent of Siskiyou, for he would have come quietly, and Bertie had just time to throw himself down as if bound when he heard the voice of the King of the Hoboes commanding the dogs:

"Down, Tige! Down, Blitzen!"

The brutes obeyed, and the next moment Big Ike stalked into the old ruin.

"Wull, how aire ye by this time? I have come ter have the pleasure of biddin' ye an eternal farewell be-

fore the boys take ye out to test the strength of a rope with yer weight."

"You have got it all your own way," said Bertie, in an apparently weak voice.

"Haw, haw! Bet yer life I have got et all my own way."

As he said that, the King of the Hoboes dropped down upon a block of stone that was only a few feet away from where Bertie lay.

A reckless purpose surged through the youth's brain, and he resolved upon a desperate stroke.

He would lay out this big fellow, and run the risks.

Making a sudden leap, Bertie landed upon Big Ike all in a heap, and bore him backward to the stone floor, and lifted his arm to deal the rascal a blow on the head with one of his revolvers.

But the King of the Hoboes, in spite of his great surprise, caught Bertie's wrist as the blow was descending.

He held the arm in a vigorous grasp.

"Easy, now, cuss ye!" he grated. "Ye are makin' a fool of yerself. Ye can't fix me that way, no use yer tryin' et. I don't know how ye got free, but ef ye don't let up this minnit I will set the dogs onto ye!"

Bertie made no reply.

It was a fight for life now, and he knew it.

With clinched teeth and resolute eye he struggled the more desperately.

Seeing that the prisoner was bent upon making his escape, if possible, the King of Hoboes called to the dogs.

In they leaped like a pair of tigers.

"Down, Blitzen! Down, Tige!"

A feminine voice spoke the command, and the form of a young girl appeared in the doorway.

In her hands she held a rope.

At her command the dogs stopped in their advance, obeying her.

"I'll kill ye fer that, gal!" yelled Big Ike. "Let them 'ar dogs alone! Help! help!"

He began to see that he would need help.

Diamond Dick, Jr., was not so easy to handle as he had looked to be, even for a man of Big Ike's size.

"At him, sirs! at him!"

Again the dogs went for Bertie.

"Down!" cried the girl, but only one obeyed her.

With a deft whirl of the rope she held in her hand, she threw a loop over the head of the other brute just as its teeth were about sinking into Bertie's shoulder.

Throwing her weight backward, she jerked the dog's hold loose and flopped him on his back on the floor, yelping.

Big Ike was frantic with rage.

"I'll settle with you fer this, gal!" he gritted, as he struggled hard to master Bertie, who had the advan-

tage and meant to keep it. "I'll choke yer life out of ye, or wuss!"

At that instant Bertie heard Handsome Harry's signal.

Bertie just then managed to get hold of one of Big Ike's revolvers with his left hand, and pulling it from his belt he dealt the King of the Hoboes a telling blow on the head with the butt end of it.

That ended the struggle.

The hobo was settled for the time being, and Diamond Dick, Jr., leaped to his feet and turned toward the girl.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"Ethel Maywood," was the quick reply. "But you have no time, for the rest of the men are coming with their horses," she added. "If you are quick you may possibly escape."

"But what will become of you?"

"He'll no doubt kill me, but no matter; better death than captivity here. Down, Tige! Back, Blitzen! Go, sir, go, or it will be too late."

Bertie made a dash for the door, holding to the girl's arm and drawing her with him, but the dogs made a leap at his throat, and he had to wheel around and silence them.

One almost planted its fangs into his face as he turned, but a shot made it throw up its head, and it rolled over dead.

Another shot in almost the same instant, and the other shared its fate.

Then Bertie and the girl dashed out.

A rush of galloping hoofs broke upon their ears instantly, and looking in that direction, Bertie discovered that half a dozen of the hoboes, mounted, were bearing down upon him.

"There they come!" cried the girl, desperately. "If you are quick you may yet escape them, for there is a horse! Go! go!"

She seemed not to think of herself and her own danger.

"You must come with me!" he cried.

"No, no, for it will mean death for us both. Without me you may possibly escape. Go, go, before it is too late! Into the saddle and off!"

Bertie had glanced where she pointed, and to his delight saw a coal-black, strong-limbed horse standing saddled and bridled only a few feet away, and that it was his own faithful friend.

It had been stolen from him some weeks before.

He whistled to it, and with a neigh it was instantly by his side, as glad to meet him as he was to possess his favorite once again.

Bertie leaped upon the animal's back, still keeping possession of the girl's hand, and called to her to give a spring upward so that he could place her in front of him.

"No! no! Hurry! hurry!" she cried. "There, hear that— Mercy! I am hit—I—I—"

Some of the hoboos had fired their revolvers as they dashed forward, and as the girl spoke she reeled and would have fallen but for the hold Bertie had of her hand.

Bending down, Diamond Dick, Jr., caught the girl about the waist and swung her up in front of him, and then, with a word to his noble horse, dashed away with his fair burden clasped to his breast, while the hoboos followed with triumphant yells.

Bertie soon discovered the cause of their exultation, for just ahead of him was the flight of stone steps we have elsewhere described, and the hoboos had every good reason to believe that this would stop his flight, as there was no other avenue open to him. But they did not know the daring nature of the youth. It was a ride for life, and Diamond Dick, Jr., would stop for nothing!

CHAPTER VIII.

A RIDE FOR LIFE.

On reaching the steep descent of stone stairs the horse stopped with fright.

"On!" cried Bertie, giving the command with voice and heel at the same time.

The hoboos were almost upon him, and their yells of victory sounded in his ears.

They did not fire, no doubt feeling sure of the capture, and perhaps afraid of hitting the girl as well.

With a snort the noble black horse obeyed the order, and started down the steep incline with a bound, while the hoboos drew rein at the very edge of the plateau and stood spellbound while they watched the daring feat.

Not one of Big Ike's followers dared to follow, and Bertie, supporting the unconscious girl with one arm, turned in his saddle and sent a defiant shot upward.

Bound after bound the noble black made, down the stone stairway, and there must have been half a hundred steps if there was one.

Half way down there was a turn.

It was the mad ride of old Israel Putnam over again, and not one of the watchers drew his breath until Bertie disappeared in safety around the bend.

Then they broke out with a mad yell, and sent a volley of bullets speeding down the stairway.

About that time Big Ike appeared from the place where Bertie had left him.

He staggered as he came forth, and was holding his head with his hands.

But in advance of him came another, yelling:

"Glee-ory to snakes! Git a gait on, thar, you fellers, and take after that cuss! Don't let him git away! Give me a hoss and let me go fer him! Wough! hiss-ss-sss! I'm the king bee rattler of the

hull nest, with seventeen rattles and a button! Whoop-ee!"

"Where is that fellow?" cried the King of the Hoboes. "Have you let him get away?"

"Couldn't help et," one man shouted. "He went down the old stairs like a blue streak of lubricated lightnin', and none of us dared ter foller him."

"Then he is at the bottom with a broken neck! Where is my horse? My horse, quick! We must git around the other way and cut him off! We kin do et, all right, if we ain't all day gettin' off!"

"Wake up snakes, and wipe yer noses!" cried Rattlesnake. "Whew! but this hyar makes me think of ther good old days of yore when a hull shootin' match of us varmints used ter git together and hiss and bite till we wur all dead but one, and I was that one. Whoopee! How did that young rooster git away, anyhow? Wough! Hiss-ss-sss! Give me a hoss, somebody, and let me hie away! A hoss! a hoss! My hull durn kingdom fer a hoss!"

And while he yelled at the top of his voice, the Rattlesnake cut up all sorts of antics, going through the pantomime of laying his foes around him right and left.

But none paid any attention to him, save some who had just tumbled out of their bunks, and wondered what it was all about, anyhow.

A horse was brought for the King of Hoboes, and he had so far recovered from the clip Bertie had given him that he was able to get into the saddle and lead his men.

With a vociferous yell, away they went down the longer slope on the opposite side of the plateau.

Their chance for intercepting the daring young wild rider was good, if he had escaped with a broken neck, for both trails terminated in one, after making the circuit of the base of the plateau.

"How did et happen?" the hoboos were demanding on every hand.

And the only one left to answer the question was the Rattlesnake.

"How did et happen?" he repeated. "How does their lightnin' strike? Arsk me somethin' easier'n that. This all come of not hangin' that chap when he was first brought in hyer."

"But you was one thet was fer not hangin him," one of the men reminded.

"No, no, ye don't onderstand at all, ye don't. This wasn't that fellow, but another. This was ther genuine and only Diamond Dick, Jr., chip of ther old block, and if he gits away you kin bet that et will be hot fer us galoots before that risin' sun goes down in ther west. Glee-ory to snakes! why wasn't I around when he started? Come, feller hoboos, and let's run to ther north end of this hyer plateau and see what we kin see!"

He led the way at a run, and the others, taking to

the idea, they all followed him with a whoop and yell.

When their cries died away in the distance a head appeared at the door of one of the old ruins and took a cautious survey of the scene.

Satisfied, evidently, a man came forth and made his way speedily to the south end of the plateau and disappeared among the trees that marked the limit of the old settlement in that direction.

It was Industrious Bill, in his English tourist's attire.

But let us follow Bertie.

He righted himself in the saddle as soon as he turned the bend in the stone stairway.

Thrusting his revolver back in his belt, he gave all attention to his horse, and the precious burden he carried in his arms.

He was now more than half-way down the dangerous passage.

Speaking kindly to his horse an encouraging word to give it confidence in itself, he left its head free, well knowing that to pull the rein ever so lightly might be to make it miss its footing.

It was a dangerous undertaking, but finally the bottom was safely reached.

"Bravo!" Bertie then cried, giving his horse a pat on the flank as it stretched itself in speed along the hard and level trail at the bottom. "You are worth your weight in gold, old fellow!"

He drew up the rein, now, and looked at the girl in his arms.

Her face was pale, her eyes closed, and he knew that she was still unconscious.

"It was better so during that ride, anyhow," he said to himself.

Then he remembered that the girl had been struck by one of the bullets that had been sent to find him at the moment of starting.

Drawing rein, he brought his horse to a stop and dismounted.

He laid the fair girl on a bank of moss under a tree close to the trail, and looked for the wound.

Her head, body, arms—nowhere could any indication of a wound be seen, but suddenly he caught sight of blood that was dropping from one of her shoes.

"Ha! in the foot, eh?" he said. "I'll have to tie that up somehow till I can get where proper attention can be given to it. But, where the deuce is it, after all?"

There was no wound in the foot.

It was no time for delicacy in the matter; it might be a death wound, if the flow of blood was not stopped.

Modestly drawing back her skirt, Bertie looked farther, following the line of red that marked its course plainly down her shapely limb, and he soon found where the trouble lay.

The bullet had cut through the thick part of the calf of her left leg, on the inside, and the wound was bleeding freely.

As quickly as possible, Bertie drew down her stocking, and, having some lint in his pocket, he forced a little of it into the wound, laying a larger piece over it, and taking off his necktie he hurriedly bound it tightly around the limb and tied it securely.

"There," he said, as he pulled the stocking to its place, "that will stop the bleeding and will do till somebody else can fix it right for you. And now come, for we have no business here."

Taking her again in his arms, he mounted his horse and dashed onward again.

It was a delay that nearly cost him dearly.

Just as he came to a point where the trail he was on merged into another, he heard a mad shout.

With a quick glance to the left, whence the sound came, he saw no less than six or eight of the hoboes tearing down the slope toward him, with Big Ike in the van.

"Great Scott!" he cried to himself. "What if I had stayed there one minute longer?"

He spoke to his horse, digging his heels into its flanks.

The noble black obeyed proudly.

"Stop!" shouted the King of the Hoboes. "Stop! or we'll fill ye so full of lead ye will think ye have been chopped fer hash!"

For answer, Bertie wheeled in his saddle and sent a shot back at them from one of his guns.

Down went a horse, and its rider took a header on the hard trail.

"One less, anyhow," said Bertie.

There was a momentary check, during which Bertie gained a rod or two more lead, but they were on after him the next moment.

And then from the top of the cliff further yelling was heard.

Bertie looked back and upward.

There on the verge of the plateau stood the hobo horde, and one figure was dancing and waving his hat in one hand and a pistol in the other and yelling at the top of his voice.

Bertie was too far away to distinguish what he said, but he caught something that sounded like "Sis-kiyou" and "seventeen rattles and a button!"

Taking off his hat, Bertie waved a signal that was taken for a sign of defiance to his pursuers.

With maddened yells, they pressed their horses, and the ride for life was on.

The trail led down a slope we have mentioned, and on in the direction of the gulch that terminated in the foothills.

Once out of the foothills, Bertie would stand some chance.

There he would be near civilization once more, and

some party passing along on some of the trails between towns might see him and lend a helping hand.

The race for life would be to get out of the hills.

This the hoboos would prevent if possible.

On they came, and so many Apaches could hardly have made more of a wild uproar.

They fired their weapons, too, and some of their bullets came zipping dangerously near; yet Bertie did not believe they were firing to hit him.

He believed that they would not want to kill the girl if they could help it.

Without her, he would have been the object of their deadly aim.

"In one thing Bertie felt secure, and that was his mount. He knew the horse, and what could be expected of it.

There were seven men in pursuit, as he counted, Big Ike in the lead.

He would not let Diamond Dick, Jr., get away from him if he could help it.

This Bertie knew full well.

He could have stopped the fellow by a shot, for he was unerring with the revolver.

But that did not suit his purpose.

He wanted Big Ike to follow him to the last extreme, hoping that he would stand a chance of taking him a prisoner.

Evidently Big Ike saw through the scheme, for presently he shouted:

"You had better stop! We don't mean to foller ye to the ends of creation, but we'll drop ye right hyer!"

"Two can play at that game," Bertie called back.

"Yes, but seven guns kin pump lead faster'n one!"

"You will hit the lady, if you fire too close!"

"We don't keer a continental ef we do! She was a dead letter on our hands, anyhow!"

"Well, say when you are ready, and we will open the ball."

"I'll open it now, cuss ye!"

The King of the Hoboes fired, and Bertie felt the bullet clip through the top of his hat.

That would not do.

Half turning, he fired one of his phenomenal "snap" shots, and down went Big Ike's horse.

Bertie could have picked off the rider as easily, but he wanted to reserve him for future use.

As it was, the King of the Hoboes came near taking a header, and only saved himself by the sprightliest kind of action.

Those immediately behind came almost tumbling over the fallen horse, but managed to stop in time, and for a few moments confusion reigned supreme.

Meanwhile, Bertie was putting distance between himself and his foes at every stride.

Big Ike was quickly on his feet, swearing like a trooper.

He obliged one of his men to dismount and give

up his horse, and soon he was leading the way again, and the ride for life continued.

But Bertie had now a good lead, and there was no immediate danger from bullets.

He had now descended the big slope and entered the gulch, and if fortune favored him he would soon be out among the foothills.

It was about this time that the young woman came to, opening her eyes and looking up into Bertie's face, at first with a startled expression, but the next with a glad-smile.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BLACK HORSE DOWN—AT BAY ON THE BOWLDER.

Diamond Dick, Jr., looked down upon her sweet face, and his handsome eyes no doubt expressed the pity he felt for her.

They were eyes such as no girl could look into without experiencing a thrill of pleasure. Her own were no less beautiful.

"Do you feel better?" Bertie asked.

"Yes, but where are we? Did we get away from them, after all?"

"They are after us, but I guess we are good for the race. We had a close shave, though. It was neck or nothing for a while."

"And how much I owe you!"

"Don't mention that. A fine fellow I would have been to leave you there with those hoboos."

"But your life was in danger. I don't think they meant to kill me."

"Big Ike threatened to do it, after you helped me the way you did. And you talk about owing me—am I not as much in your debt?"

"Oh, no——"

"Well, let us call it square, then."

"It would be unfair to you for me to do that. But my uncle will no doubt richly reward you for your services."

"I want no reward, other than a kind look from your eyes."

"And that you have. Am I not heavy for your arm?"

"If you would put a hand on my shoulder it would lighten your weight a little," said Bertie.

The fair girl did this, and more.

She put both her arms around Bertie, sitting more upright, and laid her head on his shoulder.

Thus he was relieved of her weight entirely, and was free to use both hands if occasion required, and the occasion was coming, by the sound of the yelling behind them.

"How is your wound?" Bertie asked. "Does it feel better now?"

"My wound?"

"Yes; you know you told me you were hit."

"Yes, the bullet struck my—struck near my foot. It feels as if something were binding it."

"I hope soon to have you where it can be attended to. But this uncle of yours—who is he?"

"His name is Richard Maywood. He is a rich rancher, and lives out from Wadsworth."

"And these hoboës were holding you for ransom?"

"Yes; they stole me from my uncle, and have been trying to get him to pay a price for me."

"How long ago was that?"

"About three weeks."

"You must have had a terrible experience during that time. Is it not a little strange that your uncle did not ransom you?"

"Well, it does seem so to me, but I do not want to think hard of my uncle. Perhaps the price they demanded was more than he could afford to pay."

"Not much. If he loved you, would he not have given his last dollar rather than leave you in the hands of such villains a minute longer than need be? I have my opinion of him; can't help it."

"But there must have been some reason, sir."

"Not a doubt of that. Besides, he could have stirred up the whole county in three weeks' time, and these hoboës would have been wiped out of existence. I don't like the looks of the thing at all."

"But, sir, don't make me think bitter thoughts against my uncle, please don't."

"You have got a good heart, Miss Maywood. But have you no friends besides your uncle who would take an interest in you?"

"Not here, sir. I am an orphan, and only recently came out here from the far East—from New York, in fact. There I have a—a friend who would risk his life for me if he knew I was in peril, and he could get to me."

"I take it that he is your lover, rather than friend?"

Her eyes drooped.

"Yes," she admitted.

"What's his name?"

"You would not know him."

"No, but I could send word to him that he had better come and pluck his flower if he wants to preserve it."

She smiled.

"Well, I do not mind telling you his name, but, of course, you will not send him any such ridiculous message as that. His name is Hobart Esterly, and——"

"Hobart Esterly! Great Scott!"

"You know him?"

"Well, I just do, then. He is on the staff of the—— newspaper."

"Oh! how delightful! But he never said anything to me about you, and I am sure he has told me everything."

"Good reason why—he never heard of me till with-

in the past forty-eight hours. And that is not all of it, either; he is out here in this section now."

"Oh! you cannot mean it."

"Worse still, he—— But I am not sure of that, so I will not alarm you needlessly."

"What is it? Pray, do not keep anything from me."

"Well, I expect to meet him at Hunnewell, if we escape these rascals and get there, and he will be glad enough to see you, no doubt."

Bertie had been sparing his horse a little, to reserve its strength, while this conversation was being held, and now he discovered that the King of Hoboës had gained upon him.

"Will ye give in and surrender?" Big Ike called out.

"Yes, when I am forced to," responded Bertie, defiantly.

"Do you value your life?"

"You do not seem to have much regard for yours, the way you are pressing me. The next fire I may pick you instead of your horse."

"Take that!"

Big Ike fired.

The bullet went wide by a yard or so, but the music of it made Miss Maywood cling tightly to her rescuer.

"We shall be killed!" she cried, in a whisper. "Oh! if you can only save me I shall always love you—love you as a friend, I mean."

"You will owe me nothing," said Bertie. "It is my life as well as yours."

The King of the Hoboës fired again, and this time his bullet came nearer.

"I see he is bound to have it," said Bertie. "I wanted to wait till I had got him out on the open before I dropped him, but his next shot may be a fatal one."

As he spoke he fired.

It was at the horse again, and not the rider.

The horse stumbled at once, recovered, ran a few paces further, and went down.

This time the King of the Hoboës did take a header, and went scraping the ground on his front for some distance ahead of his fallen horse.

"Fire!" he shouted. "Sock et to 'em! No matter if ye kill 'em both; let 'em have et!"

A volley was the result.

Diamond Dick, Jr., felt his noble black give a start and a quiver, and in the next moment it began to stagger.

He knew that the end of the ride for life had come now, and he feared that it would be the end of his life as well, but he was a youth who never said die.

Taking a firm hold of the handsome girl he carried, he freed his feet and prepared for the worst.

His horse stumbled, caught itself, stumbled again and went down.

There was a yell from the hoboes.

Another volley was fired, but fortunately none of the bullets took effect where it was intended they should.

As the horse went down, Bertie leaped from the saddle, being all prepared to do so, and ran for cover behind some bowlders that lay by the side of the trail just ahead.

There was still another volley of pistol shots, but fortunately no damage was done.

The next moment, Bertie was under cover.

He was on the point of dropping his burden and drawing his guns to stand on the defensive, when something caught his attention.

It was a crevice in the wall of rock just behind the bowlders, and he pressed into it and through, to see if it would not afford even a better place for the siege.

As soon as he was through the opening it widened, and there was an inviting upward slope, with a turn, as if it had been intended that a flight of stairs should one day occupy the place. Hastening up this, he found himself on the top of a huge bowlder that was hollowed out a like a bowl.

Within this hollow lay a smaller bowlder.

Dropping his fair burden, and telling her not to show her head above the top of their retreat, Bertie tried his strength on the bowlder that lay in the hollow.

He could move it, but scarcely any more.

"What do you want to do with that?" inquired the girl.

"I want to roll it down the passage and block the entrance," answered Bertie, "but I guess I am not man enough for the job."

"Let me help you."

She sprang to the task, and Bertie was surprised at the strength she possessed.

Together they rolled the bowlder to the opening and sent it crashing down the winding way up which they had climbed.

It went rolling and rumbling like thunder down its rocky course, and brought up with a crash in the narrow crevice that had given Bertie and his companion access to their model fort.

Just on the right of the passage, where it came out on the bowlder, was another opening, and Bertie knew he would have to guard that well against surprise, not knowing but it might be another avenue leading up from the trail below.

Just as the bowlder stopped with a crash, as described, there came a howl from the half-dozen hoboes.

They had been just on the point of entering the crevice.

Lucky for them that no one of their number had already entered, and luckily, too, that the crevice was

narrow enough to stop the bowlder in its downward course.

The hoboes withdrew, as pale as death, and met Big Ike, who just then came running up.

"What is the matter with you?" he cried.

They explained at once.

He rushed forward and found the crevice most effectually blocked.

Nothing short of dynamite could remove that bowlder, and there was not space enough for a man to crawl under it.

Over it, as it lay, the crevice was too narrow to admit passage, and so the hoboes were effectually cut off from their escaped prisoners.

Just then a voice hailed them:

"Now, then, what are you fellows going to do about it?"

They looked up, and there stood Bertie with a pair of revolvers leveled at them.

He had the "drop" on them in the most beautiful manner imaginable.

They made a scramble to get under cover, but there was none immediately available, and Bertie called to them again.

"Steady!" he warned. "Stand where you are, or I will make it hot for you. I want to know what you are going to do about it? Will you give us horses and let us go on?"

"Not by a big sight," roared Big Ike.

"Then what will you do?"

"We'll have ye down from thar, that's what."

"You will have some trouble doing that, I guess. You can't get at us."

"We kin starve ye out."

"I don't propose to let you do that, though."

While Bertie was holding this confabulation with the hoboes, Miss Maywood, seated further back, with her back toward him, had lifted her skirt to look at her wound.

When she saw how neatly it had been bound up, and with what article, her face became too rosy to mention.

She now understood what had made it feel as if something were binding it.

With a quick glance at Bertie, to see if he were looking, she got quickly up again and stepped to his side.

"Are you going to fight them?" she whispered.

"Yes, if need be," answered Bertie.

"Will you let me help you?"

"Are you armed, then?"

"No, but you can let me take one of your guns. I want to take half the risk, for all you have done for me."

"I can't allow that," said Bertie. "Besides, I have got pressing use for both my guns, right here. You sit down there and rest, and let me manage this business."

She obeyed him, but she watched him with a light in her eyes that bespoke urgent necessity for the early advent of Hobart Esterly, if her heart was to remain with him. At that moment, Big Ike, after a hurried word or two with his men, called to Bertie.

CHAPTER X.

A PLAN THAT DIDN'T WORK—A BIG COUP.

"Hello! up thar!"

"Well, what is it?"

"We will do what you ask."

"What is that?"

"Give ye hosses, and let ye go."

"You mean that, of course—oh, yes!"

"Yas, we mean et."

"Well, what are the terms?"

"That you pitch yer weapons down hyer and come down from thar unarmed, so's we will know ye won't go back on us and 'tack us."

"Well, that is the coolest thing on ice!" Bertie exclaimed. "Say, I feel ashamed to think that anybody would take me for such a fool as you evidently take me to be."

"But we mean et."

"Nit."

"Is that your only scheme?"

"You have heard our offer; will ye take it?"

"Oh, yes, sure; right away quick. Now, let me tell you what you have got to do."

"Wull, what is et?" cried Big Ike.

"You will leave this foremost horse just where it stands, and I will give you just half a minute to disappear around yonder bend with the rest of your outfit."

"And ef we don't—what ef we don't?"

"Well, you may have heard of the marksmanship of Diamond Dick, Jr., and if not I'll give you a few samples of it. Not to boast, but I seldom miss anything I want to hit, if I can see it, and you are the plainest targets I ever had in my life."

The hoboos, except Big Ike, evinced an inclination to take advantage of the short grace allowed them.

Big Ike made a reach for a gun.

"Steady! You touch that gun and you are a dead man before you can wink your eyes!"

Diamond Dick, Jr., held the better hand, and the King of the Hoboes was forced to recognize the fact, whether he would or not.

With loud-mouthed vociferations and threats he backed away in the direction of the bend Bertie had indicated, to which his men were speeding with all haste.

"Come!" cried Bertie. "Not many seconds of that half minute are left!"

Big Ike ran like the rest, still cursing.

They had left the horse.

"And the first man of you to show his nose around that bend will get it shot clean off his face!" Bertie called out, as Big Ike was disappearing.

He then turned to Ethel.

"Now, I am going to ask a favor of you," he said.

"You have only to mention it, I am sure," she responded. "My life is in your hands."

"And I want you to take it into your own," said Bertie. "Here is a chance for you to escape, and you must not think of refusing it."

"But what about you?"

"I must remain here to cover your retreat and hold these hungry cutthroats at bay."

"But they will kill you!"

"I don't see how, do you? How are they going to get at me?"

"But they will starve you until you will have to surrender, and then— Oh! do not ask me to leave you; I cannot!"

"You must. Listen: I will go down and get that horse around the next bend for you and tether it there. While I am gone you must hold this fort with one of my guns."

"Yes, yes!"

"At the first sign of one of them coming this way, let drive at him, whether you can hit him or not. It will probably have the effect to make him get back to cover mighty quick. Then, when I return, you will go down and mount the horse and ride for Hunnewell."

"Yes, yes! I understand."

"You may fall in with a deputy and posse from Reno, on the way, but if not, report to the authorities at Hunnewell and have them send men to get me out of this hole and clean out the hoboos' rendezvous."

"I will do just as you say; I will risk anything for you."

"Very well. Here is one of my poppers; don't hesitate one second about using it if you see a head appear."

"I won't, I assure you."

So Bertie left her and passed through the opening we have mentioned, in the hope the way would prove open down to the trail.

He soon came to a place where a cavern appeared to open on his left, but as he was not in search of caverns just then, he kept on to the right and ere long found his way out and down to the trail in the gulch.

He looked up at the monster boulder in the top of which the young lady was safely ensconced.

It was as impregnable as Gibraltar.

"I'd like to see them get me out of there," he said to himself, "and I'd like to see them get past this point, with me up there with a dose of pills ready to administer to them. Why, I could empty every saddle between the bend and the rock, no matter how fast they came!"

He looked around the bend.

No one was in sight, and the horse was still there. His own noble black was dead.

Bertie caught the horse, spoke kindly to it, and led it away to the place where the path from the boulder came down to the trail.

There he was about tethering it when he heard a shot fired.

It came from the top of the boulder.

Immediately after it, came a wild yell, together with the clatter of hoofs on the hard rock bottom, and then a scream from the girl on the top of the big boulder.

Bertie glanced up.

Her face appeared over the edge nearest him.

He regretted that he was not there; he would have given the King of Hoboes a lesson.

"Fly! Fly for your life!" the girl cried. "Here they come, the whole band of them, I guess! Go! Do not think of me; they cannot possibly get to me here; I will await your return!"

Bertie thought like lightning.

To return to the top of the boulder meant to lose the opportunity.

The girl could not get down and escape, and they would both be hemmed in their place of defense without water or food.

There was but one thing to be done.

"Hold the fort!" Bertie called out to her. "I will be back again as soon as possible. Keep your head out of their pistol range."

"Yes, yes. Go!"

Bertie vaulted into the saddle, dug his heels in the horse's flanks, and was off at once.

He got around the next bend before he was seen, and fired a shot of defiance to call the attention of the hoboes and draw them away from the place where the girl was.

They dashed on after him, and the ruse was successful until they came out in sight of him and found that he was alone.

Bertie turned in the saddle and looked back at them, and saw that Big Ike had received reinforcements.

At the same time he saw the King of the Hoboes turn and give an order, and five or six of his men fell back, evidently to look for the girl, since she was not with Bertie.

Then on they came like the wind.

Bertie soon realized that he was not astride of his noble black now.

This horse was no better than the average of those possessed by the hoboes, and he had doubts whether it would hold out against them.

Putting the rein over the back of his neck, Bertie set about loading his revolver, when, to his disgust, he found that his cartridges would not fit the weapon.

It was one of the guns Handsome Harry had

given him under the wall of the stone house, it will be remembered.

And there was only one shot left in the gun.

Bertie clinched his teeth and resolved to keep that shot until it was needed worse than at present.

"This is hard luck," he said to himself. "But who cares! I defy them all, in spite of the odds against me, and I'm going to come out on top or bust!"

Taking off his hat, he waved it and gave them a perfect warwhoop of defiance.

They responded both with shot and shout.

The race for life was on again, and this time it looked as if the chances were in favor of the pursuers.

Bertie thought less of his own safety than he did for that of the girl whom he had been obliged by force of unforeseen circumstances to leave behind him.

Would she be able to hold the place alone?

How many shots had she in that gun?

Would he find her there when he returned with help?

Such thoughts as these really worried him more than the horde of hoboes who were pressing so hard after him.

After a time he emerged from the gorge out into the foothills, and here, while the trail was better and broader, the footing was of a softer nature and more trying to the horses.

Bertie knew where he was; he remembered the way he had been brought into the hills on the previous night, and the direction in which Hunnewell lay.

He desired to reach that place as speedily as possible, get new weapons and a fresh horse, and return with assistance.

But he was being hard pressed, and it looked dubious about his getting out of the foothills.

The King of the Hoboes, in particular, was gaining upon him.

"I think I will have to give you a dose of medicine, old fellow," Bertie said, grimly, to himself. "You seem to be craving for it, and you won't rest easy till you get it. I won't kill you, though; that would spoil handing you over to the authorities at Santa Fe."

With this resolve in mind, he threw his leg over and turned squarely around in the saddle.

He now rode backward.

"Where will you have it, Big Ike?" he called out.

"There is where you will have it!" was the shout in response, and a shot at the same time.

"Never touched me!" shouted Bertie. "You had better sell out, if you can't shoot better'n that; or go off in the woods and practice for a year or two."

"I'll show you, curse you!"

He raised his weapon again, but just at that instant Bertie fired.

With a howl of pain, the hobo threw up his arms

and tumbled out of the saddle, while his horse dashed on.

Bertie had sent the shot somewhere between his arm and his ribs, merely wanting to disable him, and the bullet had probably plowed its way along a rib, making the fellow think he was dead.

"Ha! Just what I intended!" cried Bertie. "If I can only capture that horse I shall be all hunk, for it is the best one of the bunch now. Here goes!"

He quitted the horse he was on as he spoke, and made a reach for the on-coming steed.

He caught the bridle, made a vault that would have done credit to a circus performer, and was in the other saddle and on his way while the hoboes were swarming around their fallen chieftain.

That ended the race, and an hour later Bertie met a party of horsemen who were coming out from the direction of Hunnewell at a lively canter, and in the van was Joe Gregory, the cashier of the Hunnewell Bank. Explanations were brief and to the point, and Bertie turned and led them back to the charge upon the hoboes.

CHAPTER XI.

GRAND ROUND-UP AND FINIS.

Let us turn back a little.

There had been a reason why Handsome Harry did not sooner supply Diamond Dick, Jr., with a horse, as he had agreed to do.

When he left the rear of the stone house in which Diamond Dick, Jr., was imprisoned, he had a close call for being discovered, and he had to lie low and bide his time before he could get back to his bunk.

He had been there but a little while when he was called out to take his turn as guardsman, and it happened that the man on duty with him was one he feared in the sense that he could not trust him and did not want him to suspect that he had any scheme in mind.

Hence, believing that he was watched by this fellow—and perhaps he was, for Big Ike was shrewd and looked keenly to his own safety—he had to wait till off duty before he could do as he had agreed to do.

And by that time it was growing daylight.

On the way to get the horse ready he thought of the other prisoner, and, slipping in where he was, cut the cords that bound him.

At the same time he whispered a word of caution that he must not try to escape too soon, or until there was some fair chance for his getting away, which might happen pretty soon.

He made Industrious Bill promise that he would not squeal on him if he got caught.

Esterly readily promised that.

So it was that when Rattlesnake led the whoop-

ing hoboes to the end of the plateau to the north, Esterly was free to slip away and disappear in the woods at the other end.

The rough hair and beard he had worn had been torn from his face at the time of his capture, and he was *in propria persona*, save for the English tourist's suit he was sporting, even to the eyeglass dangling by its cord from a button-hole.

He was unarmed, and the only hope he had was to make the best use of his freedom and get away as quickly as possible.

He had an idea of the lay of the land, and wanted to get to Hunnewell as soon as he could.

While he had heard all the uproar, of course, yet Esterly was not aware that Diamond Dick, Jr., had been there a prisoner, like himself, for Handsome Harry had neglected to tell him that most essential fact.

His desire was to meet Bertie at Hunnewell, inform him of the place where the hoboes were rendezvoused, and assist in their capture.

But his plans were suddenly brought to naught.

Not taking good care where he was walking, looking back to see if he had escaped without discovery, his feet slipped and he shot downward into an old mine hole.

Down, and down, into utter darkness, he plunged, and then came a plunge into a bath of coldest water.

His head came presently above the surface, where he gasped and sputtered at a great rate.

Fortunately he could swim, or he would otherwise have met his death and found his grave in one and the same place.

And he had no assurance that such would not be his fate anyhow.

He thought of home, and of a certain fair-faced girl who was very dear to him, but of whose whereabouts he was at the time ignorant.

It was so dark that he could not see a thing.

Striking out, he swam to the wall that formed one side of the hole, and with one hand felt eagerly along for some projection upon which he could catch, at the same time swimming with the other.

But there was no place where he could get a grip.

Presently, however, his hand found vacancy, and he reached into what seemed to be a hole.

Such it was, but of greater extent than he imagined at first. He swam into it, and continued swimming, not knowing, of course, where he was going or what would be his fate.

As to the latter, however, he had a fearful apprehension.

At last his feet touched bottom.

He was glad enough of this, for he was beginning to grow weary, he was so chilled, and when he stood up he found that he had been swimming where the water was not nearly up to his middle.

This was a relief, and he waded forward in the same direction.

The water grew less and less deep as he advanced, and at last he came up out of it entirely on a hard, rock floor.

Still there was no light, and he had to grope his way forward as best he could, while the water dripped from him and oozed out of his shoes at every step he took.

Just how long he wandered about in that way he could not tell, but it seemed an age.

At last he caught a ray of light ahead.

He pressed forward eagerly, and ere long emerged from a cavern upon a narrow foot passage.

To the left it led downward, to the right upward, and he decided to take the latter direction, eager to get out into the sunlight as speedily as possible.

The sun was now more than an hour high—perhaps two hours, and, as Esterly saw its rays falling upon the rocks above him it made him feel warmer in anticipation of soon reaching a point where he could bathe in them.

He heard voices just then.

He stopped.

"We'll have her down from there, —— her!" a coarse voice declared, with an angry oath. "And then we'll see whether Big Ike will keep her longer a lady prisoner or not!"

"That's what's ther matter!" agreed another. "You stay right thar, gal, and you'll soon have company."

Esterly was unarmed, as we have shown.

He had his belt of cartridges around his waist, under his clothes, but of what avail was that?

Back in the mouth of the cavern he remembered that he had stumbled over a pile of loose stones in coming, and he rushed back and gathered up an armful of these.

Thus armed, he came forth and hastened up the slope, and soon a most unexpected sight burst upon his vision.

He stopped short and stared in sheer amazement.

Before him stood Ethel Maywood, the girl whose sweet face had appeared to him when he took the wild plunge into the mine shaft, and she had a big revolver aimed at his breast.

It was plain that she did not know him.

"Back!" she cried. "Get back! or I will let daylight into you quicker than scat!"

Her recent Western experience had given her vo-

cabulary some new additions, and she knew how to make use of them for good effect.

"Ethel!"

She stared hard at him, her hand dropped a little, and then of a sudden she cried:

"Hobart!"

"My darling! I would clasp you to my heart, but look at me! Besides, there is business on hand here, by the looks of things."

"Oh! save me!" she cried, now wringing her hands and bursting into tears. "I have fired my last shot; there is nothing in the pistol; we are at the mercy of those wretches!"

"Nothing in the gun?" cried Esterly. "You would have held this pass against them all, empty though it was, if you had kept up the same front you showed me when I appeared. Hal here they come!"

The hoboes were coming up the pass.

Esterly gathered up the stones he had brought, and, waiting till a head appeared, he let go at it with full force.

Down went his man, and those behind uttered vicious yells and crowded forward over their fallen companion, thinking the girl had thrown the stone and determined to have her at any cost.

Another head in sight, another stone fired with exact precision, and another of the fellows went down all in a heap. And this had the effect to make the remaining two or three stop to think about it before they took further risks in that direction.

"Let me see that pistol," said Esterly, during this brief respite. "What size is it?"

Tearing open his vest, he got at his belt of cartridges and tried one of them in a chamber of the weapon, and to his delight it fitted exactly, and he quickly loaded the gun.

"Come, gal, et ain't no use," called a voice from below. "We know ye have fired yer last shot, so ye might jist as well give in. Et will be all the wuss fer ye ef ye don't; mind, I tell ye! Hyer we come, now, an' ef ye pitch another—— Thunder!"

Esterly poured a volley down the narrow passage from the revolver to let them know their mistake.

"Take that for a warning," he cried, "and keep off!"

There was a lively scramble to get out of range, and that was the last attempt that was made to take the position by storm.

Who had fired upon them they did not know, but it was enough to know that somebody was there to the defense of the girl whom they had believed to be helpless and all but in their power.

Esterly and Ethel exchanged experiences as rapidly as they could talk, while they waited for the rescue they knew must soon come, for they had fullest confidence in Diamond Dick, Jr., and vied with each other in sounding his praises; but before the rescue came the return of the hoboes.

Then the bowlder was attacked in earnest, and as earnestly defended, and for an hour Esterly held the hoboes at bay. Then, at last, came a loud, ringing cheer, and Diamond Dick, Jr., at the head of the band from Hunnewell, and the deputy sheriff of Reno, with his posse, coming from opposite directions, caught the hoboes fairly in a trap.

Bertie and his party had fallen in with the deputy and his posse, and this plan had been quickly arranged.

There was but little firing, for the hoboes were quick to see the fix they were in, and threw down their arms and surrendered.

Bertie rode straight forward to where Big Ike stood, and laid a hand on his shoulder and arrested him at the point of a gun, and the King of the Hoboes succumbed with as good a grace as possible.

It was a case of surrender or die.

Their prisoners secured, there was a general handshaking, and while it was going on a voice broke upon the ears of all.

"Glee-ory to snakes!" was the tremendous shout. "What do me eyes behold hyer? Wake up snakes, and shake yer rattles! Whoop-ee! Wough! Hiss-ss-sss! This hyer jist tickles me cl'ar to the marrer, et does! Hillo, thar, Big Ike, is that you? I reckon ye didn't know me when ye took me into yer band, did ye? Me, ther great ontamed Sarpint of Siskiyou, State of Californnee; seventeen rattles and a button! Mebby it is jist as well that ye didn't, fer et mought 'a' been onpleasant fer all parties consarned. But yer know me now; glee-ory to snakes, yes! I'm ther right bower and plum prime joker to Diamond Dick, Jr.! Wough! Hiss-ss-sss! Wake up snakes, an' tune yer harps! Haw, haw, haw!"

It was not so much what he said that made everybody roar, as it was his manner of saying it, and his unique antics and posings.

He it was, Handsome Harry of old, who had

started off on his own tack to find Big Ike as soon as Diamond Dick told him he was wanted. He had shrewdly secured admittance to the band of hoboes only the day before the appearance of Esterly, and was intending to send Diamond Dick, Jr., the desired information as soon as an opportunity presented itself.

The two parties went on to the plateau, where it was found that the Serpent of Siskiyou had made everything ready for the coming of his chief, Diamond Dick, Jr.

The hoboes, with the exception of Big Ike, were dealt with locally, and got their deserts. Bertie turned Big Ike over to the authorities at Santa Fe, and pocketed his reward for the service.

Big Ike confessed to the truth respecting Ethel Maywood. He had stolen her with the hope of forcing a ransom out of her rich uncle, but when he opened the negotiations he found that the uncle had much rather pay him to carry the girl off into Arizona and marry her than receive her back at any price. In fact, he was willing to pay for this service, and Big Ike was only waiting to tap the Hunnewell Bank before starting.

There was a big property at stake, and with Ethel removed, the uncle would come in for all of it. But his little game was nipped in the bud, and he, too, felt the heavy hand of the law before he got done with the matter.

Esterly and Ethel were speedily married, and Esterly gave up his plan of playing tramp to get information for his paper and took another course.

Later a story leaked out about a young English tourist who created a sensation at Wadsworth by appearing there in the guise of a hobo, much to the disgust but amusement of his fellow tourists. Later still, the said tourist received his own clothes, with a note of thanks, with the contents of the pockets intact, but damaged by water to a considerable extent.

THE END.

Next week's issue (No. 303) will contain: "Diamond Dick's Mining Venture; or, The Mystery of Shaft No. 3," Diamond Dick, Jr., was started on this venture by a summons from a man he did not know. How he rescued this man from death, was imprisoned himself, narrowly escaped lynching, and finally cleared up a murder mystery make exciting reading.



"Whoopie, snakes!"

"Wake up, ye sarpints, and warble for a hot finish!"

Get busy, boys. We're rounding the turn on to the home-stretch.

Remember the contest ends on September 1. Look on page 31 for full particulars.

A Bear Yarn.

(By Roy Stanley, Tex.)

While I was in the Indian Territory, hunting, I wandered off from camp, with my rifle on my shoulder. I went up in the mountains. After going a short distance I saw a huge bear. Instantly I raised my rifle and fired. The bear felt a stinging pain and reared upon its hind feet and started for me. I fired several more shots, only to make it more enraged.

I soon saw there was little chance of escape.

I knew it was certain death to remain with the bear. I threw down my rifle and leaped down. I thought I would never reach the bottom. When I landed I felt a stunning shock and knew no more. When I came to I found myself lying on the ice, my clothes frozen to it. I struggled to free myself, but to no avail.

Suddenly I heard a yelping sound, which I knew to be wolves. A chill of horror ran over me. Being so I could not move I lost my nerve and began calling loudly for help.

I heard several shots. Soon half a dozen campmen were around me.

After telling of my adventure we went back to camp. I soon went home, and I don't want any more hunting soon.

Hurled Through the Air.

(By A. Hartman, New York.)

It is just two years ago that I will open my story. I and two friends of mine were going to an entertainment. It was about three miles from my home, and it was very dark.

Well, we got up to the place all right, and after it was over we started to go home. There was a crowd ahead of us, so we thought we would try and catch them.

We did, but in a different way from what we expected.

We let our horses go. I had a wild broncho on the right side. He was the worst horse I ever saw. He always kept going faster and faster.

We tried to stop them, but it was of no use. We might as well pull on a big tree as try to stop them.

We were just going down a steep hill at a tearing speed. The buggy kept swaying from side to side.

As we got down the hill there was a bridge.

Just as soon as we got over the bridge two of the tugs got loose and the pole came down, and over the buggy went.

I flew about ten feet ahead of the buggy, and my two friends flew the other way.

How we got off so lucky I don't know. I had a broken leg, and my friends were bruised some.

One went to the nearest place and called for a doctor to set my leg. They found the horses in pasture the next day, sound as ever.

A Photograph.

(By a Drummer's Son.)

Three jolly drummers alighted from the 'bus at a hotel and hurried in to get their names down for a room, as it was a popular town with the boys, and they expected to "Sunday" there.

Jack West was the first to register, and immediately asked for mail. Upon receiving a dainty little letter, and a larger envelope, evidently containing a photograph, he turned to a chair with a smile and tore them open. He read the letter and his eyes looked misty as he returned it to the envelope. Tearing open the larger envelope, he took a photo from it and gazed at it long and earnestly, while the tender look on his face deepened. He pressed a kiss on the photo, and just at that moment his friends turned from the register and caught him in the act of kissing the photo. A shout of laughter aroused Jack to the fact that he was acting a little irregularly for a hotel office, and the red blood mounted to his face.

"Oh, you can't blush out of it, old man. We demand to see the face that causes our estimable friend to be so indifferent to women!" cried Charley White.

"And, by Jove! there is a letter, too!"

Jack leaned back in his chair and looked at his friends through half-closed eyes for a moment, and then suddenly exclaimed:

"All right, boys, since you wish it, I will share my secret with you, and I hope you will be benefited by my confidence.

"First we will read the letter," and taking it from the envelope he read as follows:

"KANSAS CITY, Mo., July 19, 19—.

My Own Darling Papa: Mamma and I have just returned from the photographer's, and we are going to send you one of the best ones this very day, because we both love you better than any one in the whole world. Every night my mamma and I kneel by our bed and pray to the good God to bring our loved one safely back to us. We would be so happy if you did not have to travel any more. We both unite in sending a lot of kisses and our best and truest love to our darling who is far away.

"Your own little daughter,

AMY."

"Gentlemen!" It was Jack who spoke, and his voice sounded rather queer, "here is the photo you saw me kiss." He handed it to them, and this is what they saw.

A beautiful woman of about twenty-five years seated in an easy-chair, with a small Bible in her hand, a fair-haired little girl kneeling at her feet with clasped hands and eyes uplifted to the White Throne. She was engaged in prayer for the loved one who was absent.

Capturing a Cub.

(By Carl James, Chetwood, Mo.)

During the summer and winter we had many adventures in hunting and trapping of wild animals. One of these adventures was of such a dangerous character that you may feel interested in its narration.

It occurred in the dead of winter. The lakes and rivers were frozen over. There were three of us boys in the trapping business.

We were going to the traps, which were about one-fourth of a mile down the river.

As we were on our skates, it did not take us long to get there. The traps were set within a hundred yards of the river.

We hid our skates in the brush. Then we scattered out, for each one of us knew where we had to go.

Tom and I got back to the river about the same time. As we had had luck, we were not feeling very good. It was about twenty minutes before Elmer Cox joined us. All at once we heard Elmer come crashing down the bank. When he could get breath, he cried:

"Come on, boys, we've got a cub in the big bear trap."

He had said enough. The thought of having a cub was very unexpected.

When we got to the trap, as Elmer said, there was a six month's cub in it. We had the cub and then we didn't have him, for it was no easy task to take him out of the trap.

It was decided to send Tom back after some rope and the sled.

It did not take him long to bring these things to us. I managed to get the rope around the cub's hind legs and his left foreleg for his right leg was in the trap.

We soon had him tied to the sled. We were about to start home with our prize when we heard a crashing

noise at our backs. I carried the rifle as Tom and Elmer had hold of the sled rope. We did not see what it was till it was upon us. I wheeled like a flash and fired and there at my very feet lay the mother of the cub that was tied on the sled.

We took the cub home and put in a big cage that we had for any animal we might capture.

We went back to where we left the old bear. We soon had her at home and skinned. We will never forget our big catch in one day.

A Hotel Fire.

(By Louis Schluffer, S. C.)

Dong! dong! dong!

Fire! fire! fire!

First the great bell and then the cry of fire. In a few minutes all was confusion and then from around the corner dashed the great hook and ladder.

The fire was on the top floor of the St. Charles Hotel. Fortunately, no one was there at the time. In a few minutes after the engines arrived the whole top of the hotel was one mass of flames. The fire chief, being a brave man, carried a line of hose upon a ladder, but was soon beaten back by the flames.

Soon great pieces of metal began falling from the great zinc sign which stood on top of the hotel.

Everybody tried to find a place of shelter. One man who was not very fast was knocked unconscious by one of the letters from the sign hitting him on the head.

Some of the firemen tried to enter by the windows, but were driven back, scorched and blistered by the flames. One ladder that was leaning against the hotel burned through in the middle, and when it fell it almost killed a fireman who was standing below it.

The fire lasted for thirteen hours and the loss amounted to nearly one thousand dollars.

Chased By a Skeleton.

(By Charles M. Stoner, Manheim, Pa.)

Morris, Harry, Al and John, cigarmakers, worked in one factory.

For some time Harry called Morris early Saturday mornings, so that they were through working by the time the rest got to the factory. Al wanted to be called also, but Harry refused. After much pleading to be called, "just once," Morris suggested that he be called. Al's idea was that he be called first, then Morris and John. The talk in the factory all week was about ghosts. Al boasted of how he would do up any ghost that would confront him, declaring they all had money buried, and that he would get it.

Al and Harry called at Morris', then proceeded to John's home, which was beside a graveyard.

John had arranged to tie a string to his foot, one end hanging out of the window, and Al was to pull this, and waken him. Al said he would waken him or pull him through the window.

The wind blew the string over the shutter and Al failed to see it. While looking for it a queer noise was heard. Al stopped and glanced in the graveyard, and then began looking for the string. Harry was at the gate

with his lantern; now some fearful groans were heard and Harry exclaimed, "My God! Al, look there," and ran through the gate, pushing it shut.

Al glanced back in the graveyard, and there, within four feet of him, was a skeleton dancing in midair, making a noise which Al said was "worse than the bellowing of a bull." Al says he saw every bone in the body.

It grinned at him, and then reached out its bony hands to grab him. Then he let out an unearthly shriek and dashed for the gate, which, being shut, he bounded over, and down street after Harry, calling on him to stop, saying "The devil is after me."

He overtook Harry, and together they went to the factory. Morris, coming in ten minutes later found Al as white as a sheet.

Al told his adventure to each one as they came in, and wanted to fight any one who disputed any part of his story.

He was so frightened he could not work.

His ghostship was made by Morris and fixed for Al's benefit, Harry and John being confederates, and was fixed while Harry called Al. The skeleton was over five feet high, and was strung on a cord and drawn from behind the house.

When Al discovered the trick, he wanted to fight the gang.

He never asked to be called again and never boasted of his ability to lay a ghost.

A Bold Deed.

(By Ed. Davis, Wis.)

One night when all the people were asleep two villainous-looking fellows came into the town and went directly to one of the grocery, hardware, furniture and drygoods stores.

The lights in the store were out, and the proprietor asleep, so he did not hear the men when they broke out a pane of glass and entered the store unseen.

They then proceeded to search the store and took some watches from the showcase, and also some money. Then they went to the other side of the store and each took clothes, such as underwear, suits, handkerchiefs, neckties, hats, shoes, hose, etc. They then went to the schoolhouse, broke a window, threw a clock out of one room and then proceeded to another room, where they changed their old clothes for the stolen ones and left their old ones in one of the rooms, and then left town as fast as they could go.

These men were afterwards caught, and one proved to be a notorious crook, whose picture was hanging in the rogues' gallery at the capital of this State, so he was sent to States' Prison for a term of years.

The other fellow was young, and he said he was led into it by the older one, so he was sent to the reform school.

 \$1 worth of Tricks & Make-ups, sent postpaid for 25 cents stamps or silver. A nice Moustache or full Beard, Irish or Side Whiskers, any color, bottle Spirit Gum to stick them on. Box of Burns Cork to blacken up, Km. Rubber Mouth, big teeth, secret & apparatus for performing the great vanishing half-dollar trick. This big offer is to get your address to send my large ill. out'g of plays, tricks & eggs. Latest novelties. Mention paper you saw this in and I will also put in a Heavy GOLD plate finger ring FREE, send size. Address Chas. Marshall, Mfr., Lockport, N.Y.

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